

Damsels & Excess



Damsels in Excess



Damsels In Excess

Vol. 1 / Part 1 of 5

PARADISE LOST

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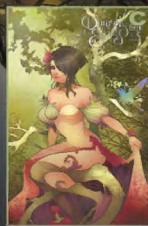
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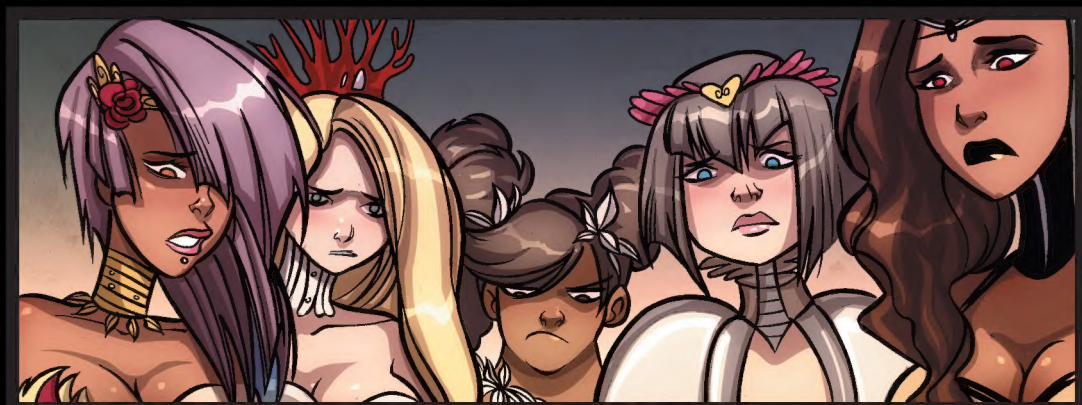
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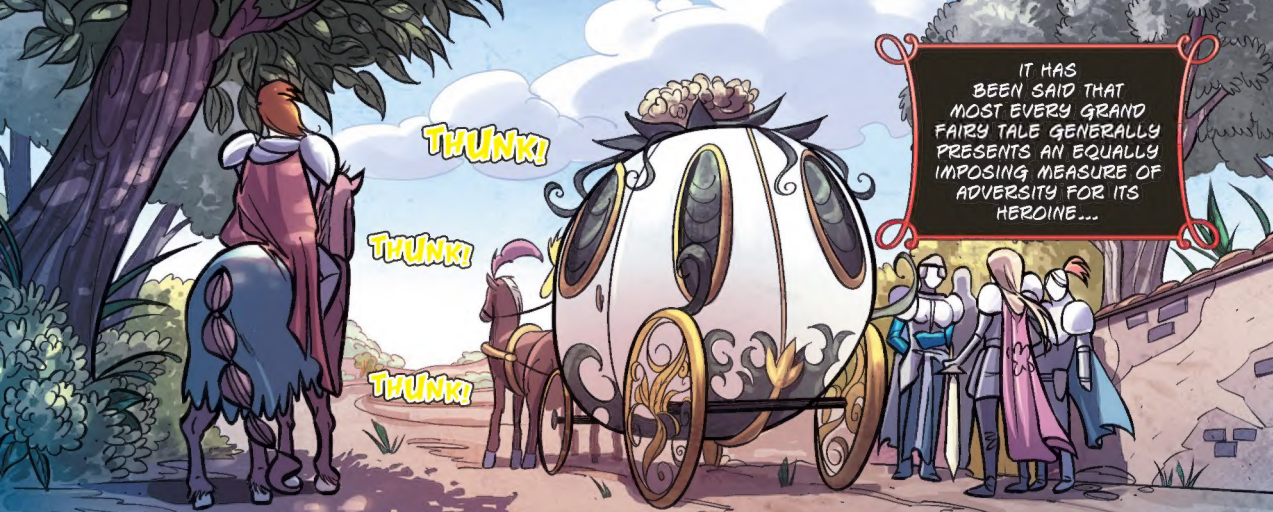
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**“Why we should listen to the words
of a lost gender is beyond me.”**



THUNK!

THUNK!

THUNK!

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT MOST EVERY GRAND FAIRY TALE GENERALLY PRESENTS AN EQUALLY IMPOSING MEASURE OF ADVERSITY FOR ITS HEROINE...

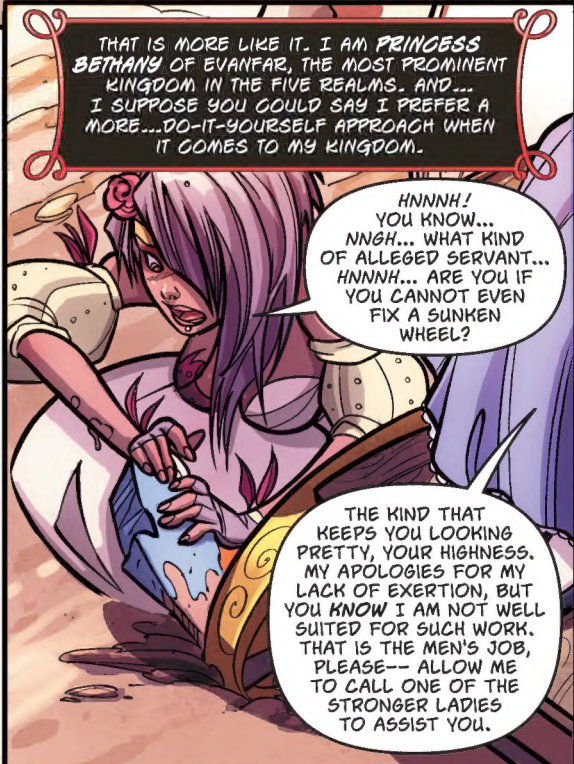


I SHOULD THINK THIS QUALIFIES.

ALMOST FINISHED..?

THUNK!

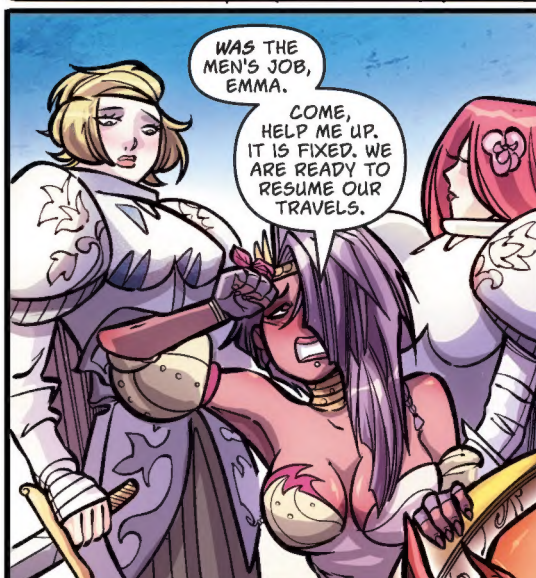
THE IMPATIENT YOUNG GIRL SHADING HERSELF ON THE ROYAL CARRIAGE... THAAAT IS NOT ME.



THAT IS MORE LIKE IT. I AM **PRINCESS BETHANY** OF EVANFAR, THE MOST PROMINENT KINGDOM IN THE FIVE REALMS. AND... I SUPPOSE YOU COULD SAY I PREFER A MORE...DO-IT-YOURSELF APPROACH WHEN IT COMES TO MY KINGDOM.

HNNNH!
YOU KNOW...
NNGH... WHAT KIND OF ALLEGED SERVANT...
HNNNH... ARE YOU IF YOU CANNOT EVEN FIX A SUNKEN WHEEL?

THE KIND THAT KEEPS YOU LOOKING PRETTY, YOUR HIGHNESS. MY APOLOGIES FOR MY LACK OF EXERTION, BUT YOU KNOW I AM NOT WELL SUITED FOR SUCH WORK. THAT IS THE MEN'S JOB, PLEASE-- ALLOW ME TO CALL ONE OF THE STRONGER LADIES TO ASSIST YOU.



WAS THE MEN'S JOB, EMMA.

COME, HELP ME UP. IT IS FIXED. WE ARE READY TO RESUME OUR TRAVELS.



OKAY--
I GUESS I SHOULD BACKUP A BIT, FIRST.

YOU MIGHT BE ASKING YOURSELF BY NOW, "WHAT AM I DOING FIXING MY OWN WHEEL, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY-- WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ALL THE MEN?" WELL, IT IS...

...COMPLICATED.

THIS RAVISHING
QUEEN HERE-- THAT
IS **VALERIA**. OR
WAS VALERIA.

AND THIS
WAS HER HUSBAND,
KING DAVIDEN. ONE OF
THE MOST HANDSOME MEN
IN ALL OF THE FIVE
REALMS--

--WHICH WAS
FITTING, SEEING
AS HOW HE WAS ALSO
THE RULER OF THEM
ALL, AT THE TIME.

AND VALERIA, WELL... I GUESS YOU
COULD SAY SHE HAD A SERIOUS
CRUSH ON HER MAN. IT IS SAID SHE
SUFFERED A TERRIBLE CHILDHOOD.
SOMETHING... AWFUL HAPPENED TO
HER IN HER YOUTH. SHE NEVER
TRUSTED MEN, HATED THEM AS IT
WERE-- UNTIL DAVIDEN IMPOSED
UPON HER. AND, HE BROUGHT LIFE
INTO HER HEART FOR THE FIRST TIME.

BUT, VALERIA ALSO
HAD A SECRET.

ONE THAT WOULD SHADOW
US ALL ONE DAY.

YOU SEE--VALERIA WAS BORN AS,
WELL, WHAT WE REFER TO AS A
DEATHBRINGER. A RARITY INDEED
IN THE FIVE. THE LAST ONE SEEN IN
THE LANDS, RIHARI, DIED HUNDREDS
OF SEASONS AGO BEFORE MY BIRTH.

A MOST
VIOLENT DEATH
SHE SUFFERED
WHEN SHE WAS
DISCOVERED.

THE KING, AS MEN OF POWER AND
CONFIDENCE TEND TO DO, THOUGHT HE
COULD HIDE HER TRUE NATURE FROM HIS
KINGDOM, AND HOPED TO CHANGE HER
FOR THE BETTER.

IT IS FINE.
WE WILL FIGURE IT
OUT, TOGETHER. I
AM HERE.

I AM...
SO SORRY, MY
LOVE.

FOR HER PART, VALERIA TRIED
HER BEST. HER LOVE OF HIM
OVERWHELMING HER INSTINCTUAL
URGES...FOR A TIME.

BUT, FOR HIS PART, MEN OF
POWER AND CHARM TEND TO
GENERALLY NOT BE THE MOST
SUITABLE MEN OF CHARACTER...

OR SECRECY.

IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE THE KING, BURDENED, OR MORE LIKELY--
OVERWHELMED BY HIS WIFE'S TROUBLES--
BEGAN LOOKING FOR LOVE IN ALL THE
WRONG PLACES.

AND WORSE YET...

...HE DID NOT
REALIZE THAT A
KING'S ACTIONS
WERE NEVER
CLANDESTINE
IN THE FIVE
REALMS..

NOR WERE THEY FREE
OF REPERCUSSION.

MY LOVE!
I... UH--

DO NOT UTTER
SUCH WORDS OF
ENDEARMENT TO
ME! NEVER.
AGAIN!!!

≡COUGH COUGH≡
PLEASE! STOP!

YOU KNOW WHAT I
AM! WHY WOULD YOU
DO THIS TO ME?! YOU
KNOW I CANNOT
CONTROL IT!

HUUUUURRRRRHHH!

YET, IT WAS
TOO LATE.

YEAH--I
WOULD SAY SO.
TOO LATE FOR
ALL OF US.

BETHANY ALWAYS
DID HAVE A SOFT SPOT FOR
THE FALLEN QUEEN. SUCH A KIND
RETELLING. ME? I HEARD THE KING
GAGGED TO DEATH ON HIS OWN BLOOD
AS SHE LOOKED ON WITH PLEASURE.
ALL VERY GROSS, IF YOU
ASK ME.

THE TRUTH IS,
THE QUEEN LET HER
JEALOUSY GET THE BEST OF
HER. SHE COULD NOT CONTROL
HER EMOTIONS OVER ONE SILLY
MAN, AND NOW ALL OF THEM ARE
GONE. HER SORCERY SPREAD
ACROSS THE FIVE LIKE WILDFIRE
IN THE FOREST. SOON, THEY
WERE ALL DUST. DEAD.
KAPOOT!

AND, LET
ME TELL YOU--
IT TURNED OUT TO
NOT BE AS GREAT AS
YOU WOULD THINK
WITH NO MEN
AROUND.

CITIZENS OF ILINA'S
TERRACE, AS THE ANNIVERSARY
OF THE MORROW'S EVE, I AM HONORED
TO ALLOW YOU ALL TO PRESENT ME
YOUR ROYAL TRIBUTES.

I SUSPECT I KNOW WHAT
YOU ARE THINKING--DID I
REALLY RENAME MY OWN
REALM AFTER MYSELF? AND
THE ANSWER WOULD BE-- OF
COURSE! TRULY, CAN YOU
THINK OF ONE BETTER?

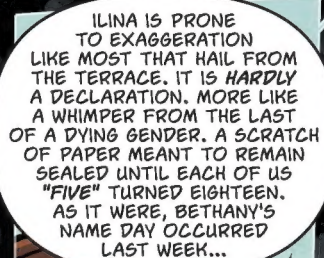
BEFORE I DUTIFULLY INHERITED THE THRONE
AFTER BOTH MY FATHER AND BROTHER'S
PASSING, THE BAY WAS A CESSPOOL OF
MASCULINITY AND MISBEHAVIOR.

I CLEANED THE KINGDOM UP,
MADE IT RESPECTABLE ONCE
MORE...AND NOW THE LADIES
ADORE ME.

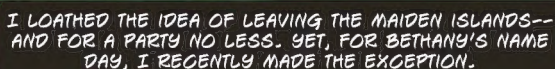
TAAADAAAAY
LADIES! I WANT
TO BE FASHIONABLY
BUT NOT UNREASONABLY
LATE--THERE IS A
DIFFERENCE, YOU
KNOW!

TONIGHT IS A VERY SPECIAL
OCCASION FOR ALL OF US WHO
SUFFERED THROUGH THE DAY OF
SHADOWS. EACH YEAR THE FIVE
OF US--THE LADY FIVE--AS THE
CITIZENS LOVE TO ADORN US,
REUNITE TO CELEBRATE ANOTHER
YEAR'S PASSING AND-- OH YES
OF COURSE-- TO MEMORIALIZE
OUR LATE BOYS.

HOWEVER, TONIGHT--
IS EVEN GRANDER. FINALLY,
AFTER SEASON-BEYOND-SEASON
OF WAITING, WE FINALLY GET TO
OPEN THE DECLARATION OF
THE PASSING MEN.



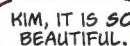
ILINA IS PRONE TO EXAGGERATION LIKE MOST THAT HAIL FROM THE TERRACE. IT IS HARDLY A DECLARATION. MORE LIKE A WHIMPER FROM THE LAST OF A DYING GENDER. A SCRATCH OF PAPER MEANT TO REMAIN SEALED UNTIL EACH OF US "FIVE" TURNED EIGHTEEN. AS IT WERE, BETHANY'S NAME DAY OCCURRED LAST WEEK...



I LOATHED THE IDEA OF LEAVING THE MAIDEN ISLANDS-- AND FOR A PARTY NO LESS. YET, FOR BETHANY'S NAME DAY, I RECENTLY MADE THE EXCEPTION.



MAY I HUMBLY PRESENT TO YOU A SYMBOL OF YOUR HONORED STATUS AS EVER ALLY TO THE MAIDEN ISLANDS. CRAFTED OVER ELEVEN SEASONS.



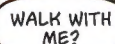
KIM, IT IS SO BEAUTIFUL.



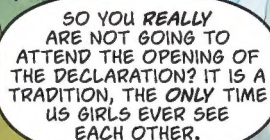
YOU ARE ONE OF THE VERY FEW PEOPLE I AM HONORED TO CALL A FRIEND, BETHANY. ACCEPT IT GLADLY ON BEHALF OF MY KINGDOM AND ITS DENIZENS.



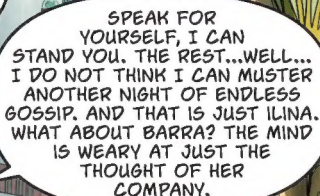
THIS IS TOO MUCH, REALLY.



WALK WITH ME?



SO YOU REALLY ARE NOT GOING TO ATTEND THE OPENING OF THE DECLARATION? IT IS A TRADITION, THE ONLY TIME US GIRLS EVER SEE EACH OTHER.



SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, I CAN STAND YOU. THE REST...WELL... I DO NOT THINK I CAN MUSTER ANOTHER NIGHT OF ENDLESS GOSSIP. AND THAT IS JUST ILINA. WHAT ABOUT BARRA? THE MIND IS WEARY AT JUST THE THOUGHT OF HER COMPANY.



I WORRY WHAT YOU WILL SAY ABOUT ME NEXT?

KALEENA--
I DID NOT THINK YOU
WOULD MAKE IT!

I RARELY
ANNOUNCE MY
COMING AND GOINGS
THESE DAYS--IT IS...
MORE SUITABLE FOR MY
SECURITY FORCE IF MY
PRESENCE REMAINS
A MYSTERY.

JACOB--
DEAR, MUST YOU
SIT IN HER THRONE?
RESPECT THE
SANCTITY.

IT IS
SO PLUSH,
LOVE.

YOUR SECURITY
FORCE? SOUNDS...
INTIMIDATING.

THE POINT, EXACTLY,
KIMBERLEIN.

THE FIVE IS *ANYTHING* BUT
STABLE NOWADAYS. BEST TO PREPARE
FOR THE WORST BEFORE IT BREATHES
DOWN YOUR NECK, NO?

IT HAS BEEN AGES
SINCE I HAVE SEEN YOU
OUTSIDE THE MAIDENS.

NOT LONG
ENOUGH.

I KNOW DEEP DOWN BENEATH
THAT ROCK SOLID EXTERIOR IS A
WARM AND MELTED CENTER, YOU
CANNOT FOOL ME.

COME, LET US PUT ASIDE OUR
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN HONOR OF
THE NAME DAY GIRL. THREE PRINCESSES
IN ONE CASTLE, THE KINGDOM WILL
SHINE TONIGHT.

BESIDES, IT COULD
BE WORSE. I COULD
HAVE BEEN ILINA.

NOW, NOW. WE SHALL
NOT BE THOSE GIRLS. ILINA
IS...STRONG-WILLED, BUT I
BELIEVE SHE CARES.

YES, ABOUT
HERSELF AND
HER TAN.

NOW, SHOW ME HOW YOU
HAVE HEEDED MY ADVICE AND
SECURED THE CASTLE SINCE
WE LAST CONSULTED.

UM...

DO NOT
WORRY ABOUT
ME LADIES...
LADIES?

I KNOW WHAT THESE
GIRLS THINK...



THEY SMILE AND
PAINT THEMSELVES THE
EMBODIMENT OF GRACE
AND LEADERSHIP.

AND SINCE
YOU DID NOT ASK--
I WILL TELL YOU--THE
TRUTH IS, I FIND THEIR
TRANSPARENCY TO
MY LIKING.

BETTER TO
KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE
BUT YOUR ENEMIES--WELL,
YOU KNOW THE REST.

SINCE THE MEN CROAKED, THESE GIRLS HAVE RUN
THEMSELVES FUTILE ATTEMPTING TO LEAD THEIR KINGDOMS
WITH WHAT LITTLE KNOWLEDGE THEY POSSESS.

I, ON THE OTHER HAND,
WAS LEADING THE **GREAT**
KEEP LONG BEFORE MANKIND
TOOK ITS LAST BREATH.



YOUR HIGHNESS,
ARNEN HAS SEEN
SOMETHING...TROUBLING
ON HIS LAST PATROL. I
RETURNED AS SWIFTLY
AS I WAS ABLE.



WHAT
DID YOU SEE,
ARNEN?

IT WAS
TWO MOONS AGO,
ALONG THE LONELY ROAD.
ARNEN'S CHARGES...THEY
ENCOUNTERED...



ARNEN
SAW...



...
WHAT WAS
IT?



ARNEN WAS LEADING
THE PATROL, NEAR THE
BANKWATER CROSSING.

ARNEN ALWAYS TELLS HIS STALLIONS TO KEEP
THEIR EYES OPEN, ANY NUMBER OF TROUBLES
AWAIT IN SUCH A SOULLESS PLACE.



YET, EVEN ARNEN WAS NOT
PREPARED FOR SUCH A SIGHT.



ENOUGH
WITH THE
DRAMA, SPIT IT
OUT UNICORN--
WHAT DID YOU
SEE?



IT WAS
A BOY.



DID YOU
SAY...A BOY?
AS IN A MALE? DO
NOT HUMOR ME,
ARNEN.

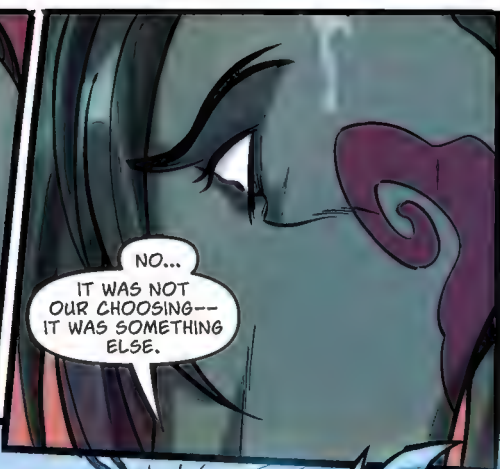
ARNEN WOULD
NEVER, YOUR
HIGHNESS.
WE
ALL SAW
HIM.



AND
WHAT DID
YOU DO?

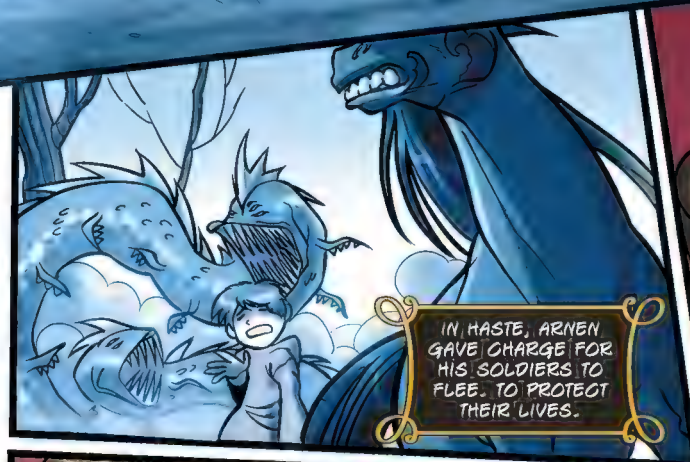
ARNEN WAS
UNSURE WHAT
TO DO NEXT
MY LADY...

SO, YOU
LEFT THE BOY
THERE?!



NO...
IT WAS NOT
OUR CHOOSING---
IT WAS SOMETHING
ELSE.

SOMETHING...TERRIBLE.
LIKE HORRORS FROM OUR
DARKEST NIGHTMARES
TOOK SHAPE...



IN HASTE, ARNEN
GAVE CHARGE FOR
HIS SOLDIERS TO
FLEE. TO PROTECT
THEIR LIVES.



THAT DOES
SOUND TERRIBLE
INDEED...

...YOU FOUND
A BOY. A FULL-
BLOODED MALE.
POSSIBLY THE LAST ONE
IN THE FIVE REALMS...
AND YOU LEFT IT
THERE...?

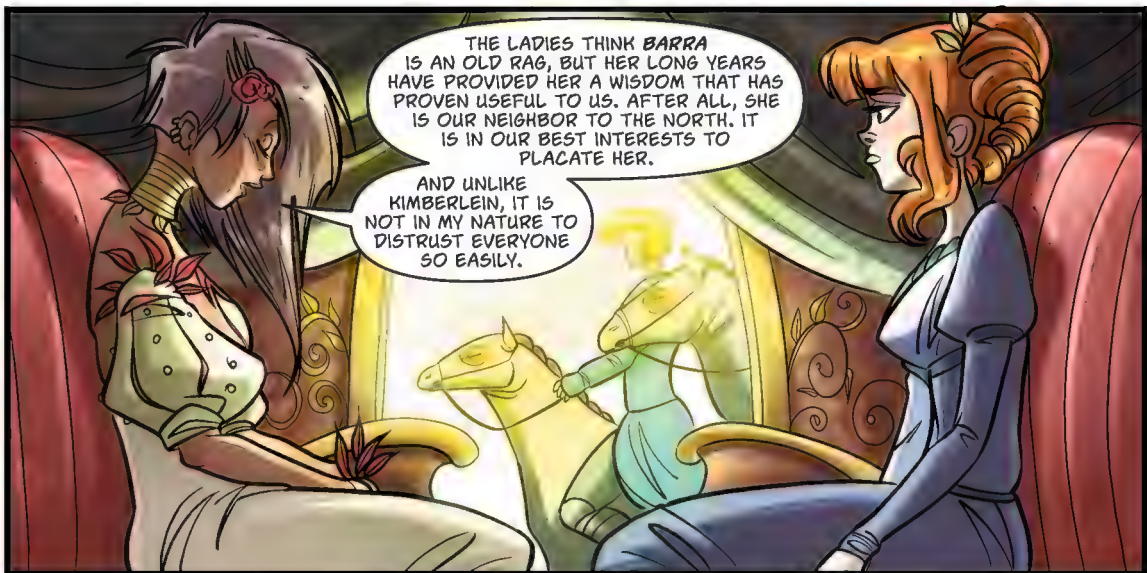
MY LADY,
WE--



--BRING
ME THE
BOY!!!

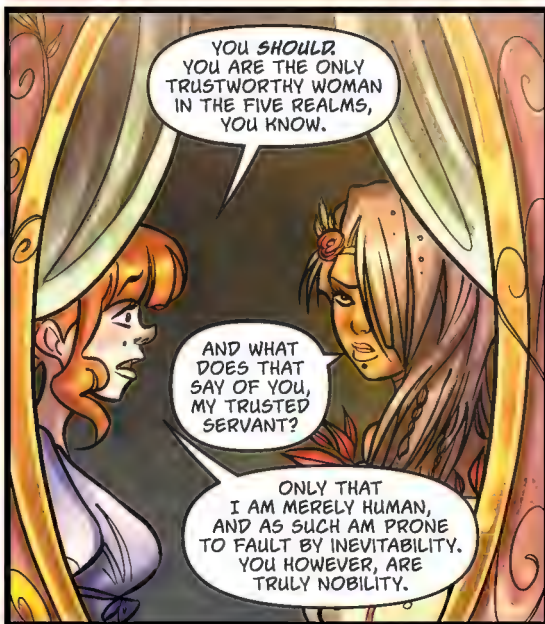
THE SHADOW
MOUNTAINS IS
DESERTED, AND HAS BEEN
FOR MORE SEASONS THAN
I CAN COUNT. YET, YOU ARE
CAPTAIN OF THE KEEP! DO
NOT THINK TO RETURN
EMPTY-HANDED. DO
YOU HEAR ME?!

AS ORDERED,
YOUR HIGHNESS.
WE WILL SET OUT
AT ONCE.



THE LADIES THINK **BARRA** IS AN OLD RAG, BUT HER LONG YEARS HAVE PROVIDED HER A WISDOM THAT HAS PROVEN USEFUL TO US. AFTER ALL, SHE IS OUR NEIGHBOR TO THE NORTH. IT IS IN OUR BEST INTERESTS TO PLACATE HER.

AND UNLIKE **KIMBERLEIN**, IT IS NOT IN MY NATURE TO DISTRUST EVERYONE SO EASILY.



YOU SHOULD. YOU ARE THE ONLY TRUSTWORTHY WOMAN IN THE FIVE REALMS, YOU KNOW.

AND WHAT DOES THAT SAY OF YOU, MY TRUSTED SERVANT?

ONLY THAT I AM MERELY HUMAN, AND AS SUCH AM PRONE TO FAULT BY INEVITABILITY. YOU HOWEVER, ARE TRULY NOBILITY.

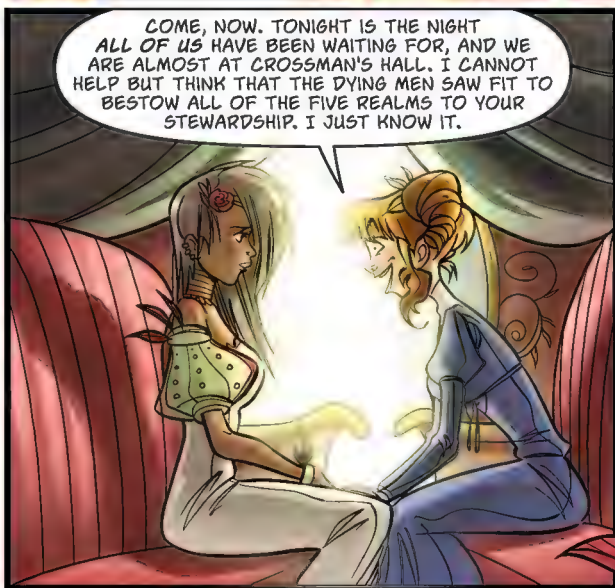


I FEEL ANYTHING BUT, THESE DAYS.

TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I HAVE HARBORED AN UNEASY FEELING THE PAST FEW MOONS.

PERHAPS A POTION TO EASE YOUR ILLS?

NO, THANK YOU. THIS I FEEL IS SOMETHING MORE THAN THE COMMON COLD. I DO NOT KNOW, I SUPPOSE I AM BEING ANXIOUS FOR NO MATTER.



COME, NOW. TONIGHT IS THE NIGHT ALL OF US HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR, AND WE ARE ALMOST AT **CROSSMAN'S HALL**. I CANNOT HELP BUT THINK THAT THE DYING MEN SAW FIT TO BESTOW ALL OF THE FIVE REALMS TO YOUR STEWARDSHIP. I JUST KNOW IT.



IN ALL HONESTY--THAT IS WHAT I FEAR MOST.

I CARE ABOUT BETHANY.

BUT, THE MAIDEN ISLANDS BEND THE KNEE TO NO ONE WOMAN BUT MYSELF. IT IS NOT A STATUTE BORN OUT OF CONCEIT, BUT OF FAITH.

THESE ISLANDS WERE FORGED FROM THE MAGIC OF OUR GODDESS, ARTIANA, MY GREAT, GREAT GRANDMOTHER.

SHE DIED SO THAT WE COULD LIVE IN PEACE AND HARMONY--EXCLUSIVE FROM THE EVER-BICKERING FOUR LAND REALMS.

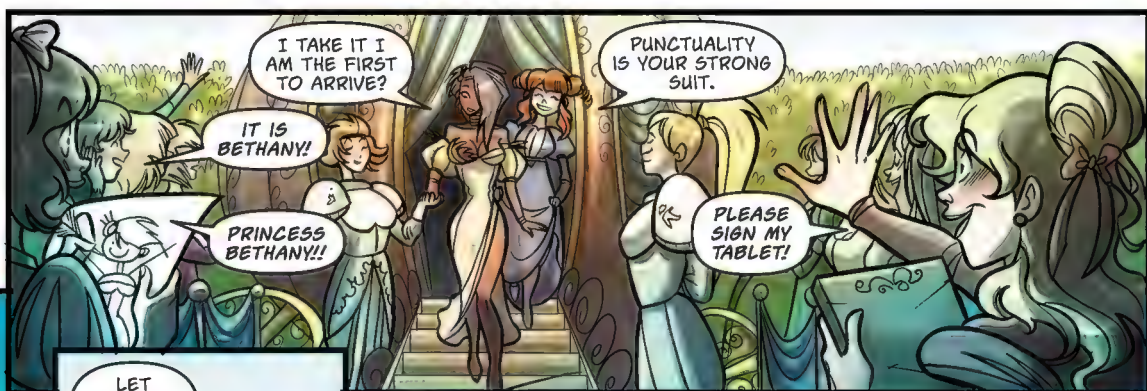
OUR POWER OVER OUR TERRITORY DOES NOT EXTEND MERELY TO ITS SHORES...

...BUT TO ALL THAT SURROUNDS IT.

IF THE SPECULATION PROVES TRUE, AND BETHANY IS TO REIGN SUPREME OVER THE FIVE, MY JOURNEY TO GROSSMAN'S HALL IS WITH A HEAVY HEART.

WHY WE SHOULD LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF A LOST GENDER IS BEYOND ME. NO GOOD CAN COME OF THIS DECLARATION'S OPENING...

...YET, I WILL PROTECT MY PEOPLE AT ALL COSTS.



I TAKE IT I AM THE FIRST TO ARRIVE?

IT IS BETHANY!

PRINCESS BETHANY!!

PUNCTUALITY IS YOUR STRONG SUIT.

PLEASE SIGN MY TABLET!

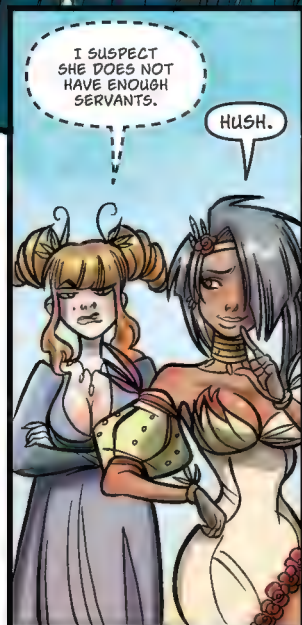


LET US HOPE THIS GOES WELL.

WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU ARE GOING?



MY DEAR FRIEND.



I SUSPECT SHE DOES NOT HAVE ENOUGH SERVANTS.

HUSH.



ILINA, IT HAS BEEN TOO LONG.

PRECISELY FOUR SEASONS IF MY MEMORY SERVES.

ALTHOUGH, I SUPPOSE YOU COULD HAVE REMEDIED THIS DESPAIR WITH AN INVITATION TO A CERTAIN PARTY HELD LAST WEEK?



OH, I...UH... DID NOT CONSIDER THAT YOU WOULD WANT TO COME. A THOUSAND APOLOGIES, I UH--

--THINK NOTHING OF IT, MY DEAR. THE JOURNEY FROM THE TERRACE HERE NEARLY ENDED ME. I SHOULD SAY A TRIP TO EVANFAR WOULD HAVE LEFT ME FAR CRANKIER THAN USUAL.

WELL, WE WOULD NOT WANT THAT NOW WOULD WE?

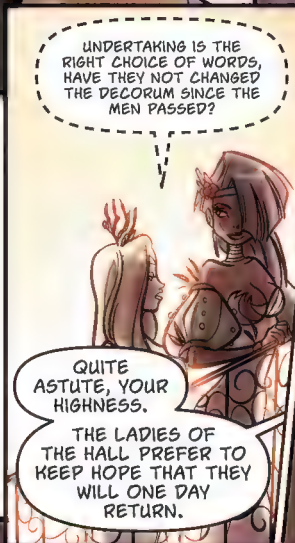


AH, TWO OF
OUR MOST BEAUTIFUL
PRINCESSES HAVE ARRIVED---
WELCOME PRINCESSES
BETHANY AND ILINA.

NO, THANK YOU.
FOR SUCH AN IMPORTANT
UNDERTAKING, CROSSMAN'S
HALL IS HONORED TO HOST
SUCH A HISTORICAL OCCASION.
PLEASE, ALLOW ME TO
SHOW YOU TO YOUR
CHAMBER.

DEBORI,
THANK YOU FOR
HAVING US.

I SHALL
AWAIT YOU
DOWN
HERE.



UNDERTAKING IS THE
RIGHT CHOICE OF WORDS,
HAVE THEY NOT CHANGED
THE DECORUM SINCE THE
MEN PASSED?

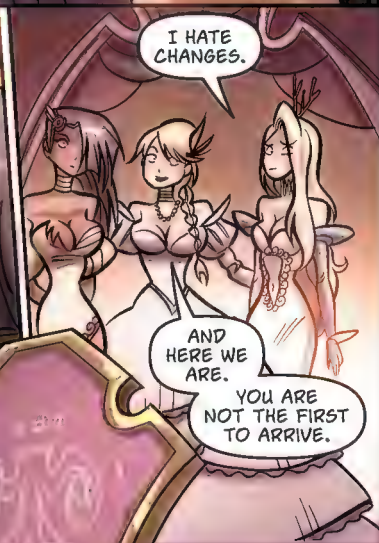
QUITE
ASTUTE, YOUR
HIGHNESS.

THE LADIES OF
THE HALL PREFER TO
KEEP HOPE THAT THEY
WILL ONE DAY
RETURN.



PERHAPS THE DECLARATION
WILL SERVE TO HELP IN THIS
REGARD?

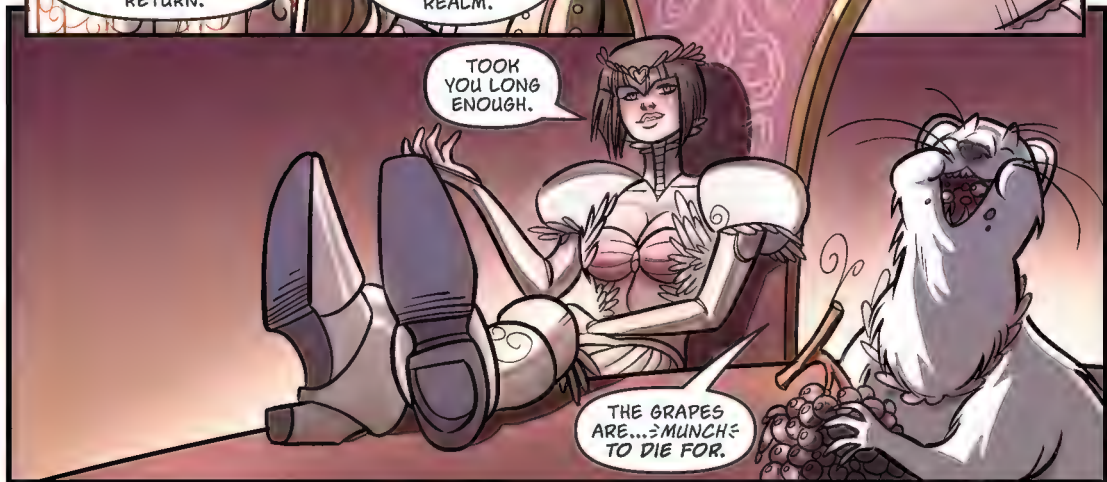
SADLY,
I DOUBT THAT.
THE DYING MEN
WERE ANYTHING BUT
PROPHETIC IN THEIR
LAST DAYS. I SUSPECT
THIS WILL MORE LIKELY
BRING FORTH A NEW
SET OF STANDARDS
FOR THE REALM.



I HATE
CHANGES.

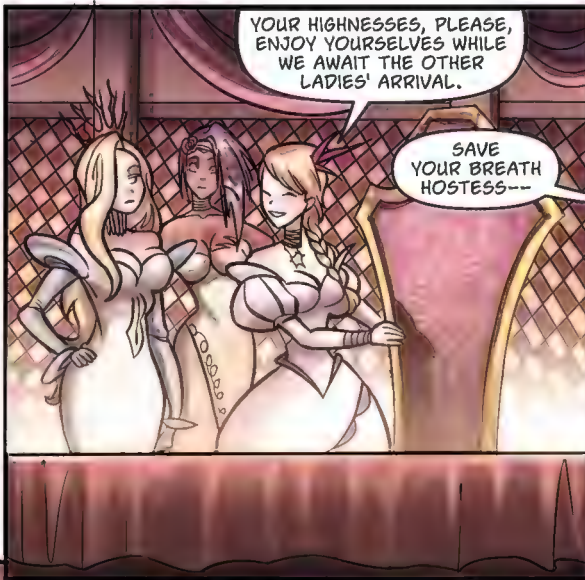
AND
HERE WE
ARE.

YOU ARE
NOT THE FIRST
TO ARRIVE.



TOOK
YOU LONG
ENOUGH.

THE GRAPES
ARE...MUNCH-
TO DIE FOR.



YOUR HIGHNESSES, PLEASE, ENJOY YOURSELVES WHILE WE AWAIT THE OTHER LADIES' ARRIVAL.

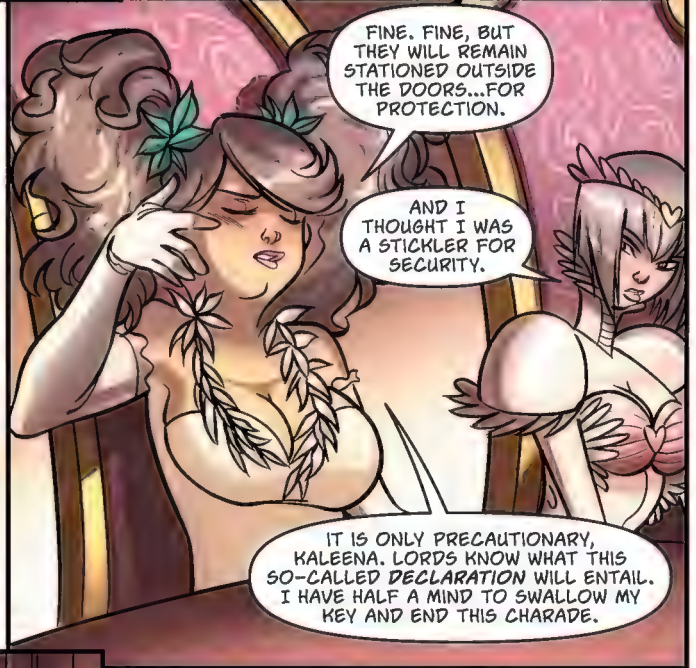
SAVE YOUR BREATH HOSTESS---



I SEE I STAND UNFIT TO RECEIVING AS EFFUSIVE A GREETING AS THESE TWO. REGARDLESS, SHOW ME TO MY SEAT.



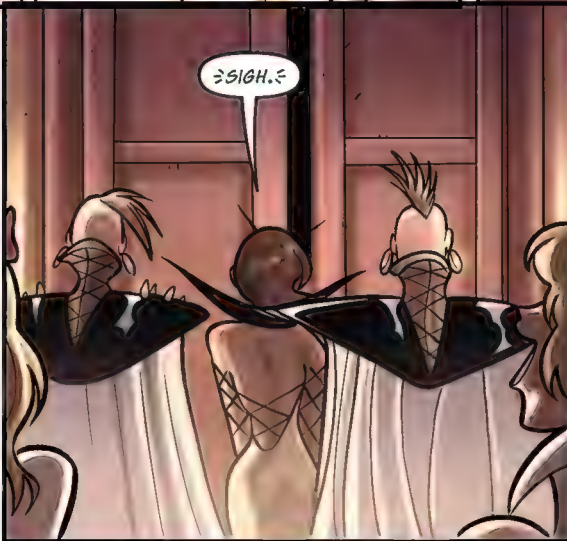
PRINCESS BARRA, YOUR HIGHNESS...YOUR ARRIVAL BRINGS US GREAT JOY...B-BUT...IT WAS DECREED THAT ONLY THE FIVE MAY HOST THE OPENING OF THE DECLARATION. I CANNOT ALLOW YOUR SOLDIERS IN THE GRAND CHAMBER.



FINE. FINE, BUT THEY WILL REMAIN STATIONED OUTSIDE THE DOORS...FOR PROTECTION.

AND I THOUGHT I WAS A STICKLER FOR SECURITY.

IT IS ONLY PRECAUTIONARY, KALEENA. LORDS KNOW WHAT THIS SO-CALLED DECLARATION WILL ENTAIL. I HAVE HALF A MIND TO SWALLOW MY KEY AND END THIS CHARADE.



=SIGH.=



ALRIGHT, LET US GET THIS OVER WITH.



ARNEN JUST
WANTED TO
GET IT OVER
WITH.

PRINCESS
BARRA THINKS
ARNEN IS
SCARED BUT
ARNEN IS NO
COWARD.



HOWEVER, A UNICORN
DOES NOT GROW OLD BY
TEMPTING DANGER.

AND A CAPTAIN DOES
NOT PUT HIS SOLDIERS
IN HARM'S WAY.



STAY CALM.
WE ARE CLOSE. THE
BOY MUST BE FOUND AND
BROUGHT BACK TO THE GREAT
KEEP, THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS
CANNOT BE UNDERSTATED,
OR WE SHALL NOT
RETURN.



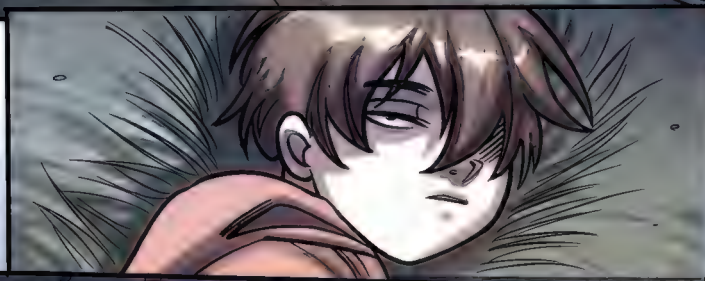
THERE...



...IT
APPEARS
WE ARE
LUCKY.



COUGH,
COUGH!



REEEEIIIIIIIIII!!!

THIS IS
QUITE THE
SIGHT...

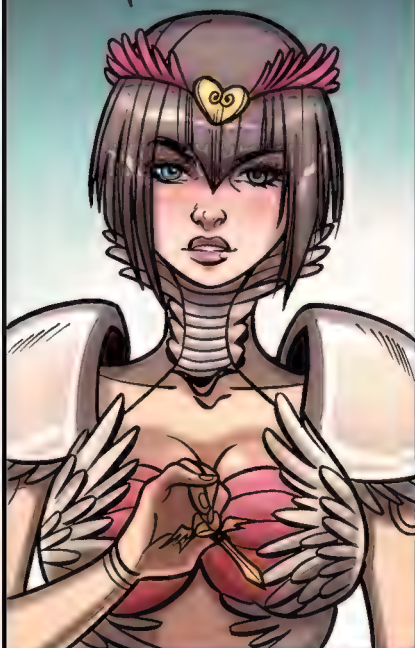
A UNICORN
OF THE KEEP.

A PITY, YOU
APPEAR TO BE
A MALE.

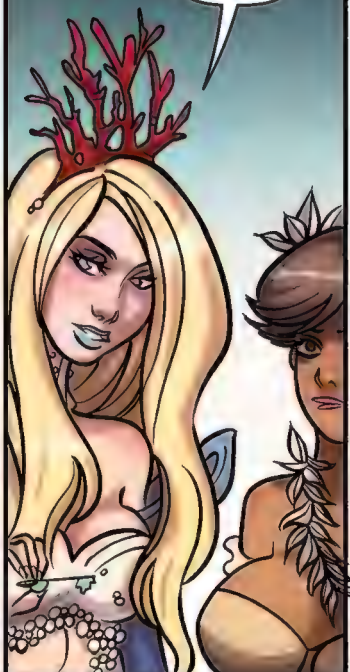




YOU LADIES
STILL HAVE YOUR
KEYS, I TRUST?



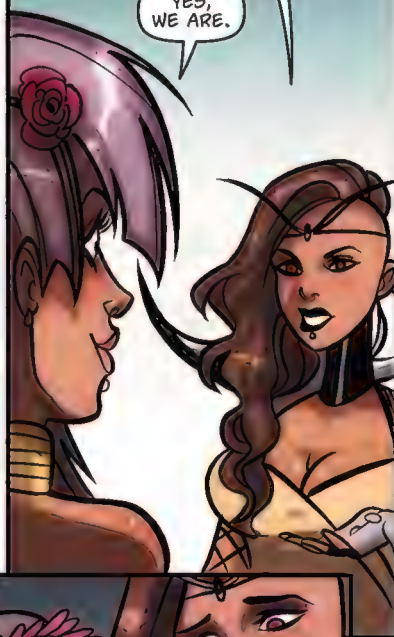
SAFE AS
EVER.



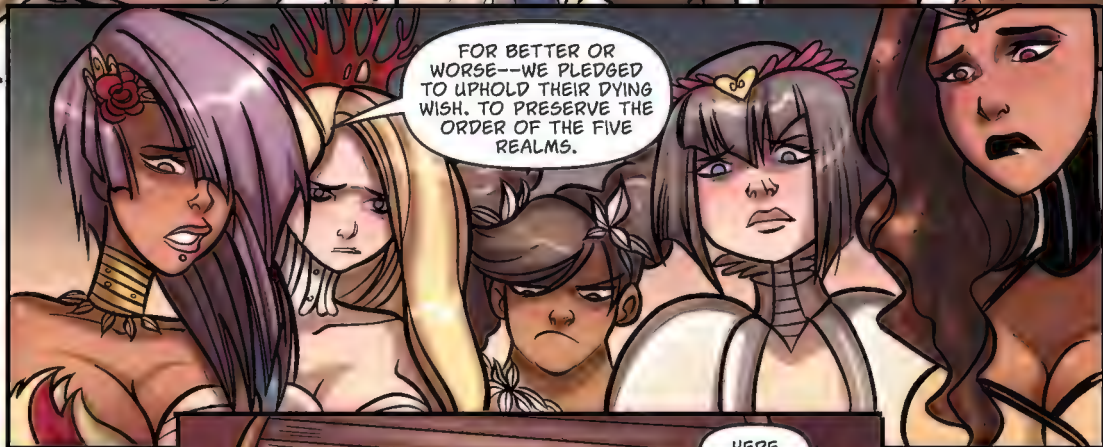
KIM, I AM
GLAD YOU DECIDED TO
COME AFTER ALL.

I HAVE MADE
MY RESERVATIONS
APPARENT, BUT WE
ARE FIVE.

YES,
WE ARE.

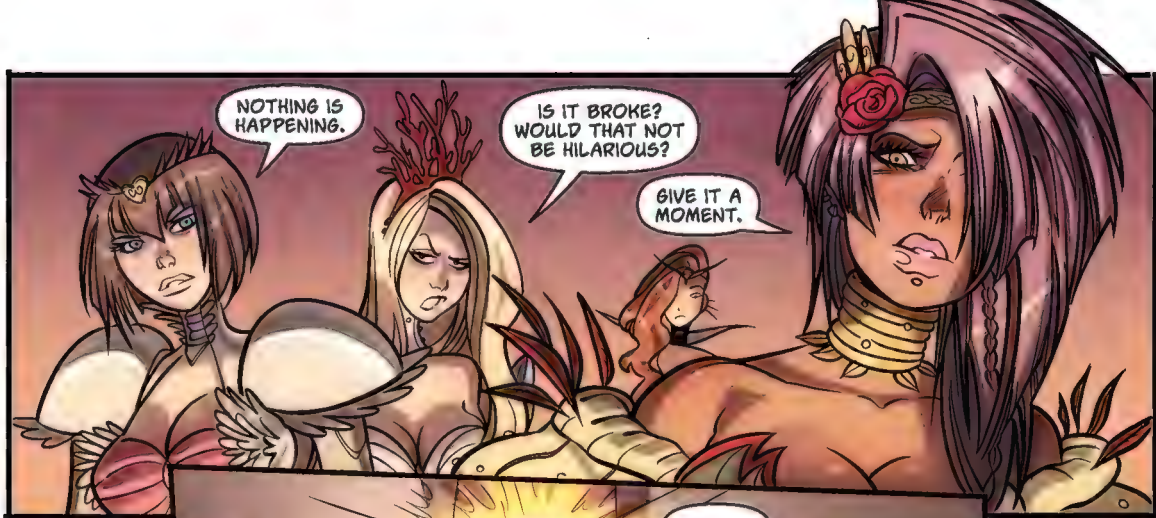


FOR BETTER OR
WORSE--WE PLEDGED
TO UPHOLD THEIR DYING
WISH. TO PRESERVE THE
ORDER OF THE FIVE
REALMS.



HERE
GOES...

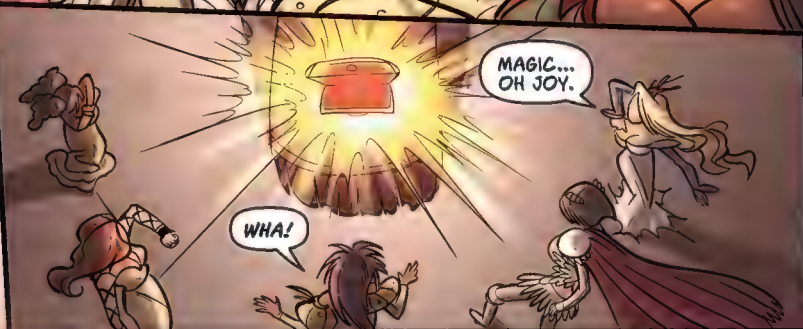




NOTHING IS HAPPENING.

IS IT BROKE? WOULD THAT NOT BE HILARIOUS?

GIVE IT A MOMENT.



MAGIC... OH JOY.

WHA!

LADIES OF THE FIVE, LORDS PRAY THIS FINDS THE REALMS IN GOOD HEALTH, A FAR BETTER FATE THAN WE HAVE SUFFERED.

OUR LAST DAYS ARE UPON US, AND WHILE WE GRIEVOUSLY DESCEND INTO EXTINCTION, WE ORDER THE REALM TO BESTOW OUR PASSING WISH, IN HOPE TO SPARE THE REALMS OF FUTURE DEPRAVITY.

I...DO I KNOW THIS MAN?

WE WERE... FOOLISH. UNAWARE OF THE GRAVE PERIL WE FACE. OUR UNDERESTIMATION PROVING TO BE OUR DOWNFALL.

YET, LET OUR SACRIFICE STAND AS TESTAMENT TO YOUR FUTURE WELLBEING. YOU WOMEN ARE THE FIVE REMAINING DESCENDANTS OF THE ROYAL BLOODLINES OF THE REALMS. AS SUCH WE HAVE SWORN TO PROTECT YOUR LIVES EVEN AFTER OUR PASSING...

I AM LARGOS,
THE SECOND BORN
SON OF ARISTA--

--WAIT,
DID HE SAY
ARISTA?

SHHH!

...AND
DEATHBRINGER.

WHAT?!

OH,
DEAR.

--AND BROTHER
TO KING DAVIDEN. AND IN
MY STEWARDSHIP IS THE LADY
BETHANY, MY LONE NIECE AND
HEIR TO EVANFALL...

IT IS WITH
GREAT PAIN AND
SADNESS, THAT WE--
THE LAST OF THE DYING
MEN OF THE FIVE REALMS,
MUST SENTENCE LADY BETHANY,
BEFORE HER POWERS MANIFEST
BEYOND CONTROL, TO HER
DEATH, COMMENCING UPON
THE PASSING OF HER
EIGHTEENTH
NAME DAY.

GODS...

THIS
CANNOT BE
TRUE.

BETHANY...
I...

...BETHANY
MUST BE PUT
TO DEATH.

OH, YES,
I MAY NOT HAVE
MENTIONED IT,
BUT--THE QUEEN
OF SHADOWS.
YOU KNOW, THE
TERRIBLE MASS
MURDERER OF
ALL THE MEN?

SHE IS SORT OF
MY MOTHER.

IF SAID ACTION IS
NOT TAKEN BY THE PASSING
OF FOUR SEASONS TIME, BY OATH TO
OUR WISE AND TRUE GODS OF EVANFAR,
EACH OF YOU SHALL BE STRIPPED OF YOUR
CLAIM TO THE RESPECTIVE REALM OF
YOUR BIRTH. TRUST--WE HAVE NOT
COME TO THIS DECISION
IN HASTE...

TO BE CONTINUED!

MAP OF THE FIVE REALMS

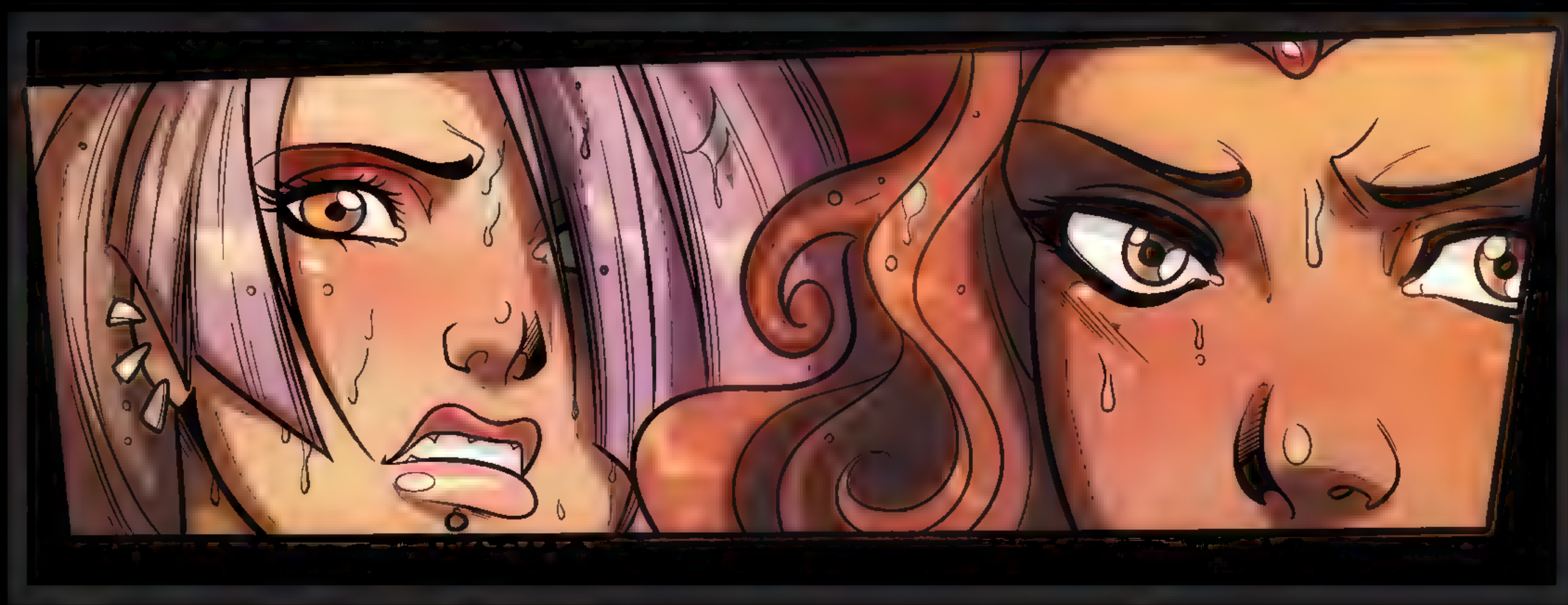


Princess



Darkstalkers





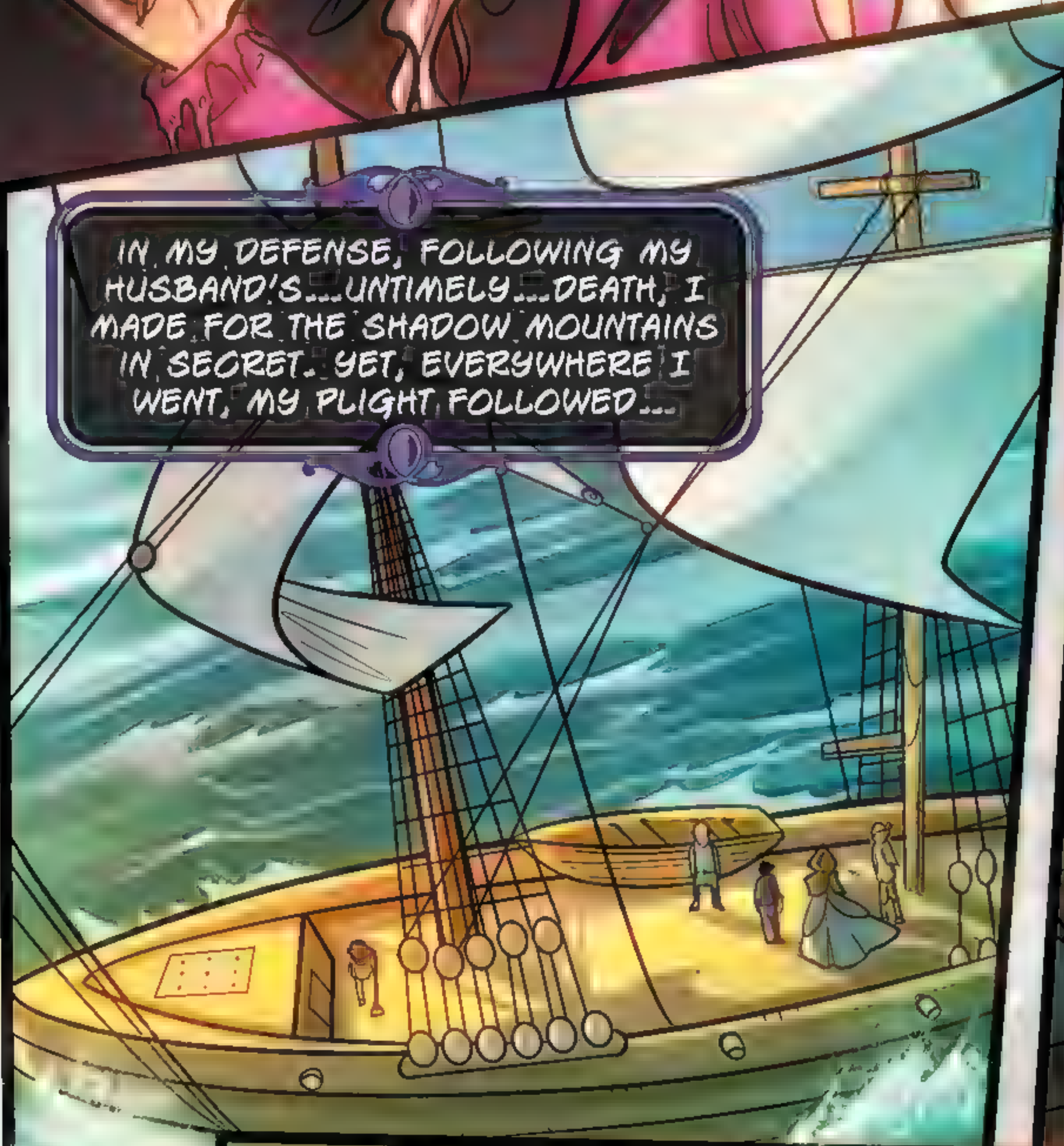
**“Listen to me... Have I ever
put you in harm’s way?”**



MY REPUTATION
TENDS TO PRECEDE
ME, BUT TRUTHFULLY, I
AM NOT AS TERRIBLE AS
MOST WOULD HAVE
YOU BELIEVE.

I MEAN, YES---I DID
MURDER ALL OF THE MEN
IN THE REALMS, BUT WHEN
YOU REALLY THINK ABOUT
IT...IS THAT SO
TERRIBLE?

IN MY DEFENSE, FOLLOWING MY
HUSBAND'S...UNTIMELY...DEATH, I
MADE FOR THE SHADOW MOUNTAINS
IN SECRET. YET, EVERYWHERE I
WENT, MY FLIGHT FOLLOWED...



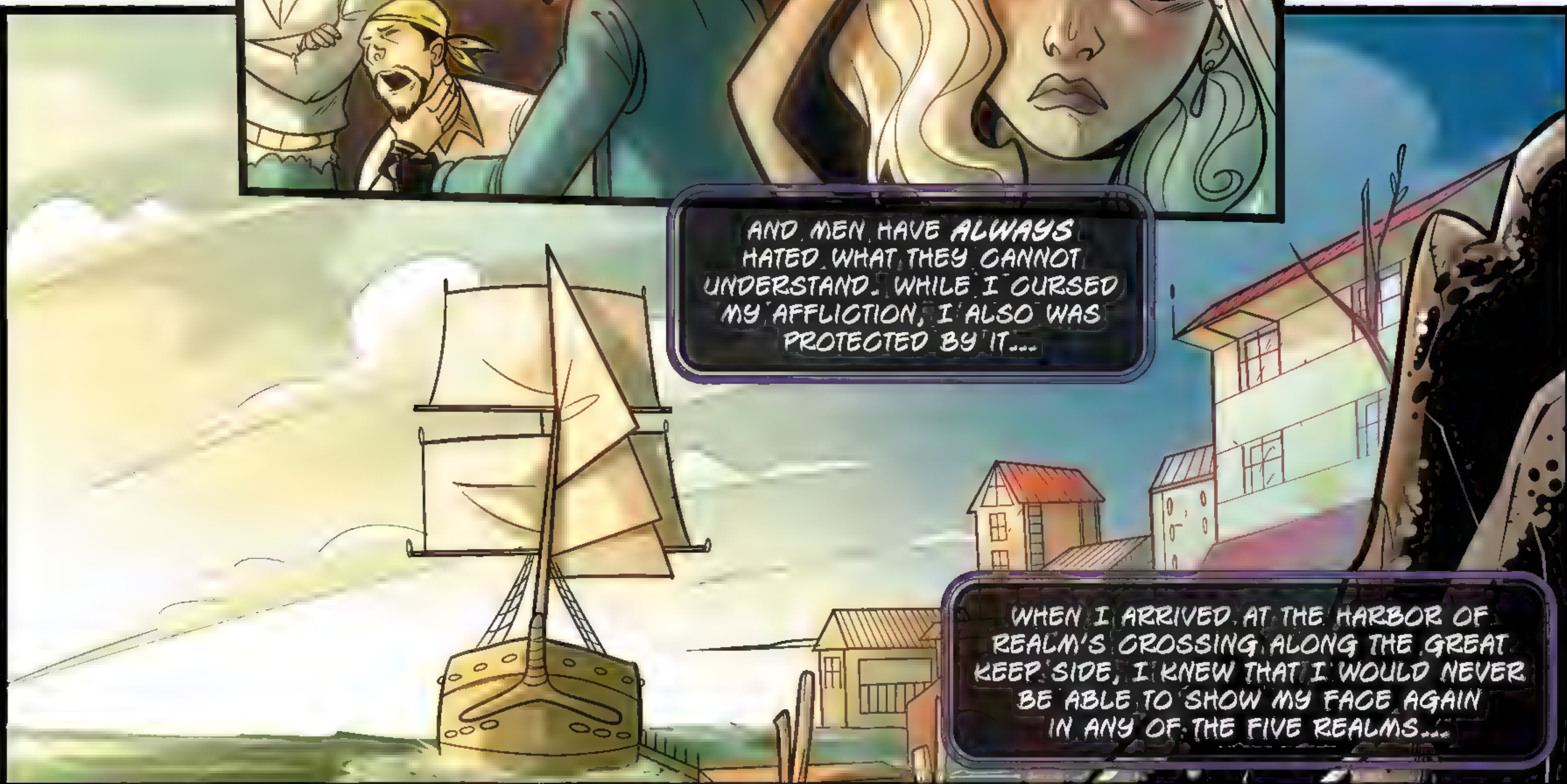
MY REGRET WAS
DEEP, HOWEVER,
THERE WAS NO
REMEDY I COULD
OFFER.



COUGH!
COUGH!
COUGH!



AND MEN HAVE ALWAYS
HATED WHAT THEY CANNOT
UNDERSTAND. WHILE I CURSED
MY AFFLICTION, I ALSO WAS
PROTECTED BY IT...



WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE HARBOR OF
REALM'S CROSSING ALONG THE GREAT
KEEP SIDE, I KNEW THAT I WOULD NEVER
BE ABLE TO SHOW MY FACE AGAIN
IN ANY OF THE FIVE REALMS...



YET, ALWAYS
WOULD I BE
FEARED.

TELL ME, UNICORN,
WHAT NOBLE CAUSE
ENTAILS YOUR ARRIVAL
IN THE SHADOW
MOUNTAINS?

ARNEN...
ARNEN...



I WILL ACCEPT
THAT AS A FEEBLE
INTRODUCTION, BUT THE
QUESTION REMAINS... WHY
HAVE YOU VENTURED INTO
MY HOMELAND?



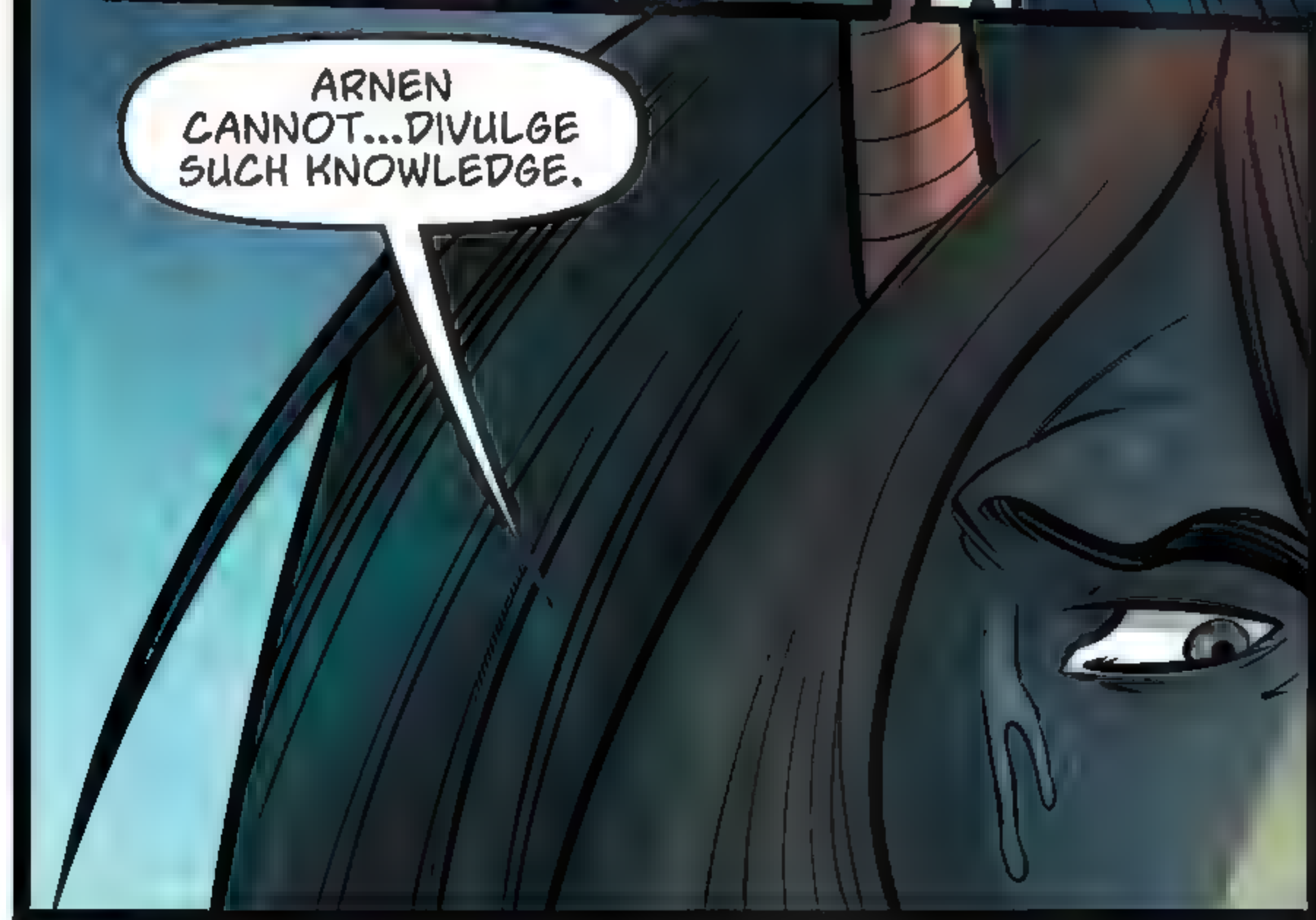
ARNEN...ER...
WAS GIVEN ORDERS.
ARNEN WILL...

≡GULP!≡

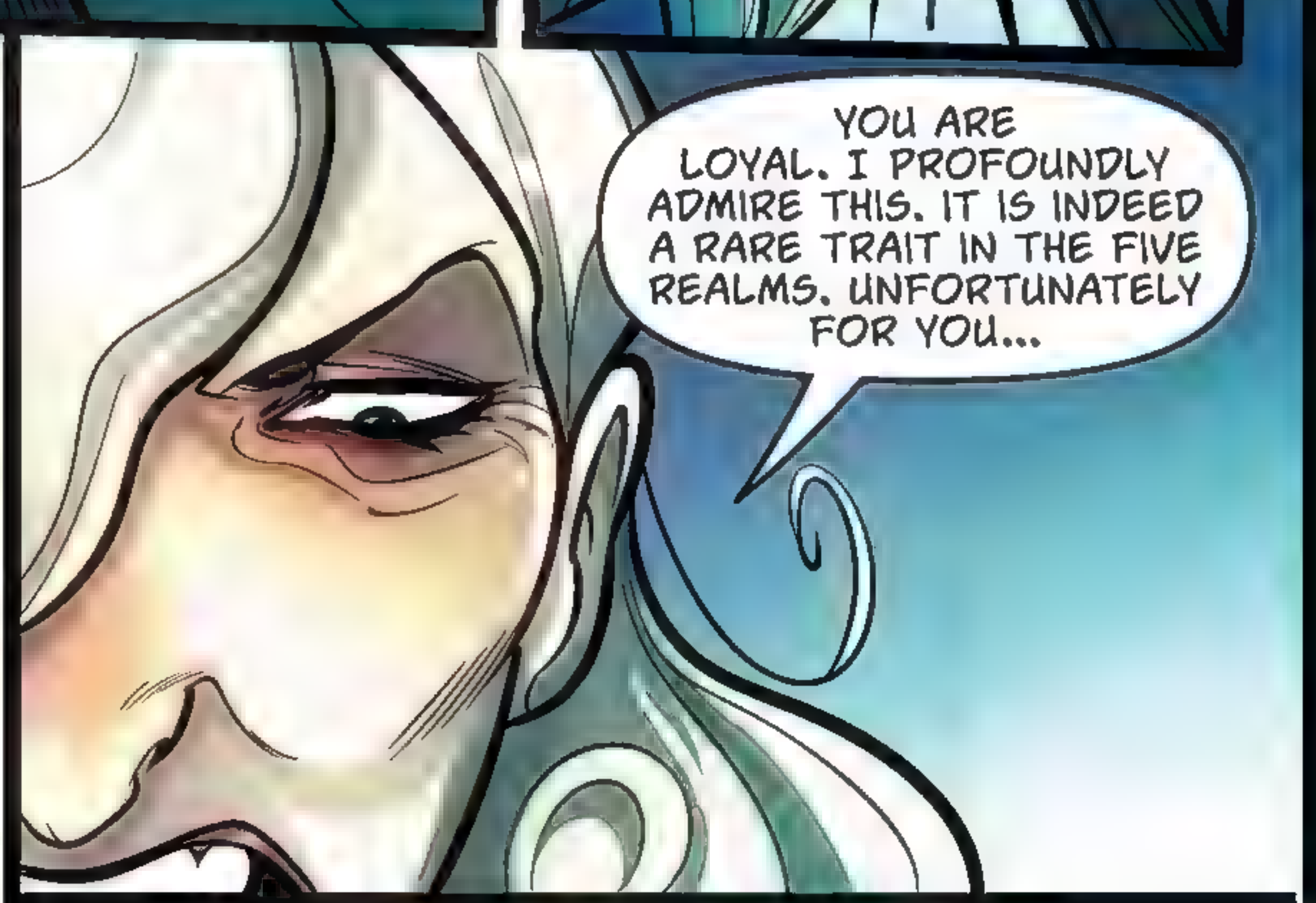
...DUTIFULLY FOLLOW
HIS PRINCESSES' ORDERS
NO MATTER THE COST
TO HIS OWN SAFETY.



AND TELL ME,
YOU MAGNIFICENT
CREATURE---WHO SHALL
I CREDIT WITH SUCH
AN ORDER?



ARNEN
CANNOT...DIVULGE
SUCH KNOWLEDGE.



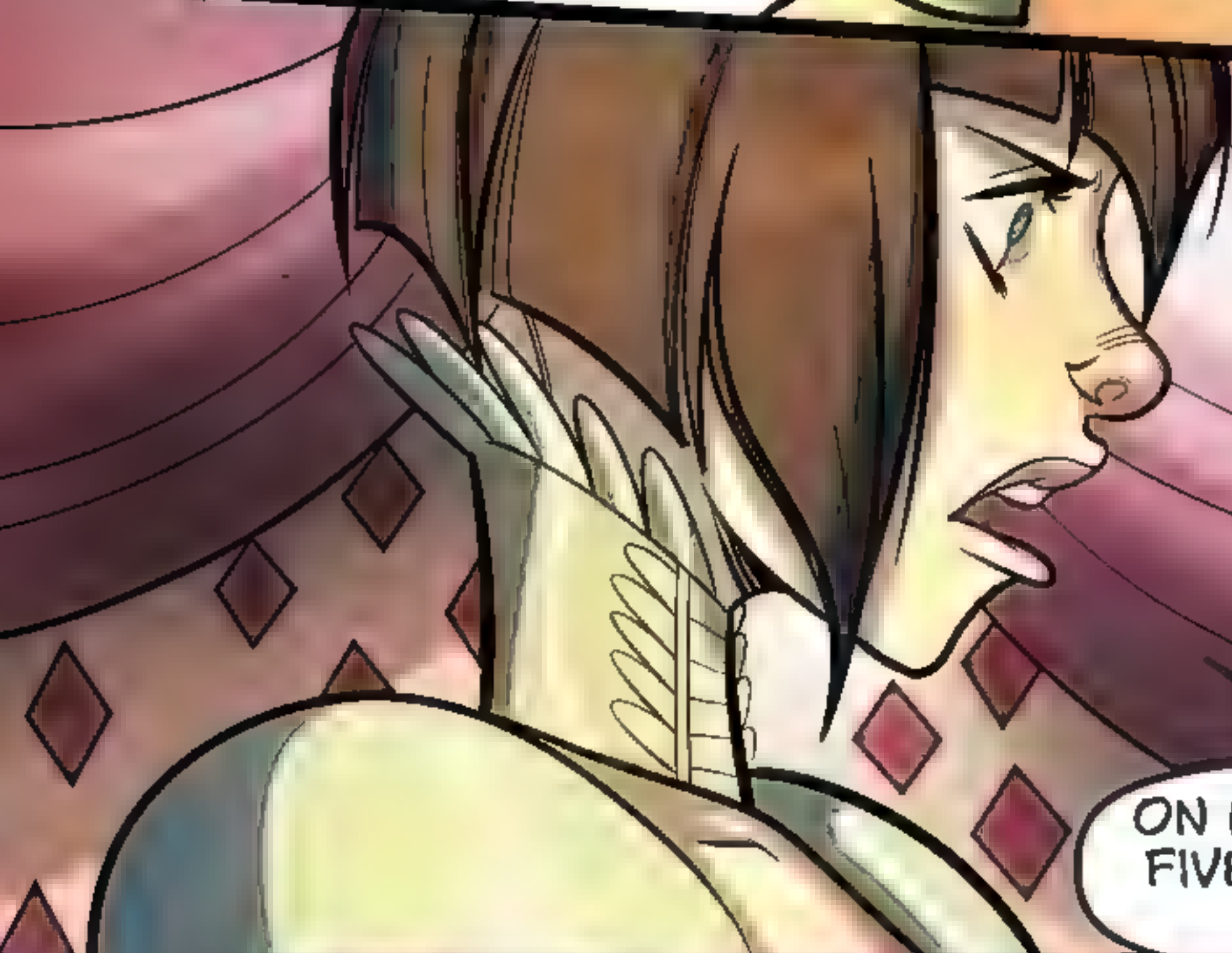
YOU ARE
LOYAL. I PROFOUNDLY
ADMIRE THIS. IT IS INDEED
A RARE TRAIT IN THE FIVE
REALMS. UNFORTUNATELY
FOR YOU...



PUT
TO DEATH?
ME?!
I DO NOT
UNDERSTAND.

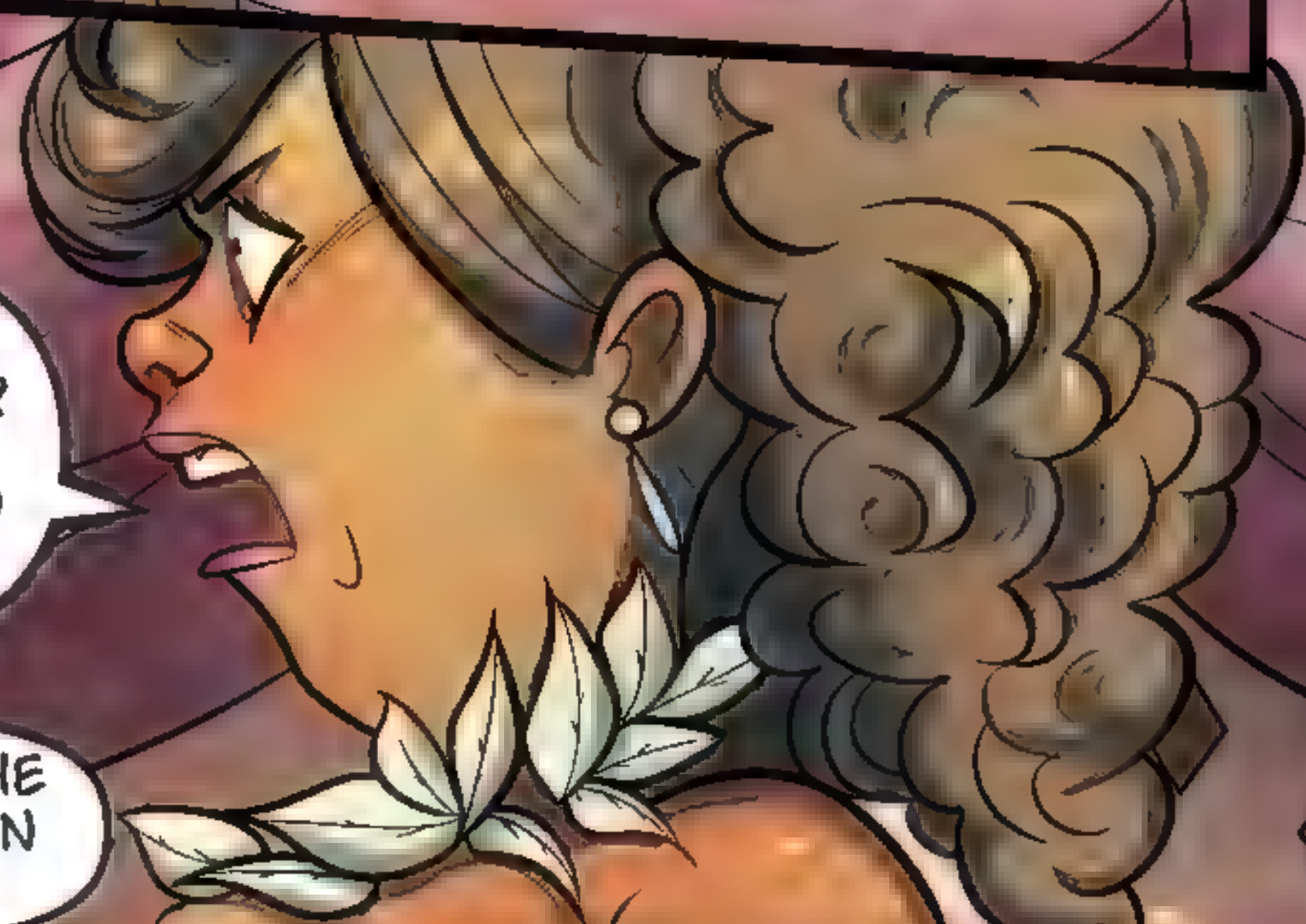


I UNDERSTAND
PERFECTLY. THE DYING
MEN HAVE DECREED THEIR
FINAL WISH. IT IS OUR
DUTY TO FOLLOW IT.

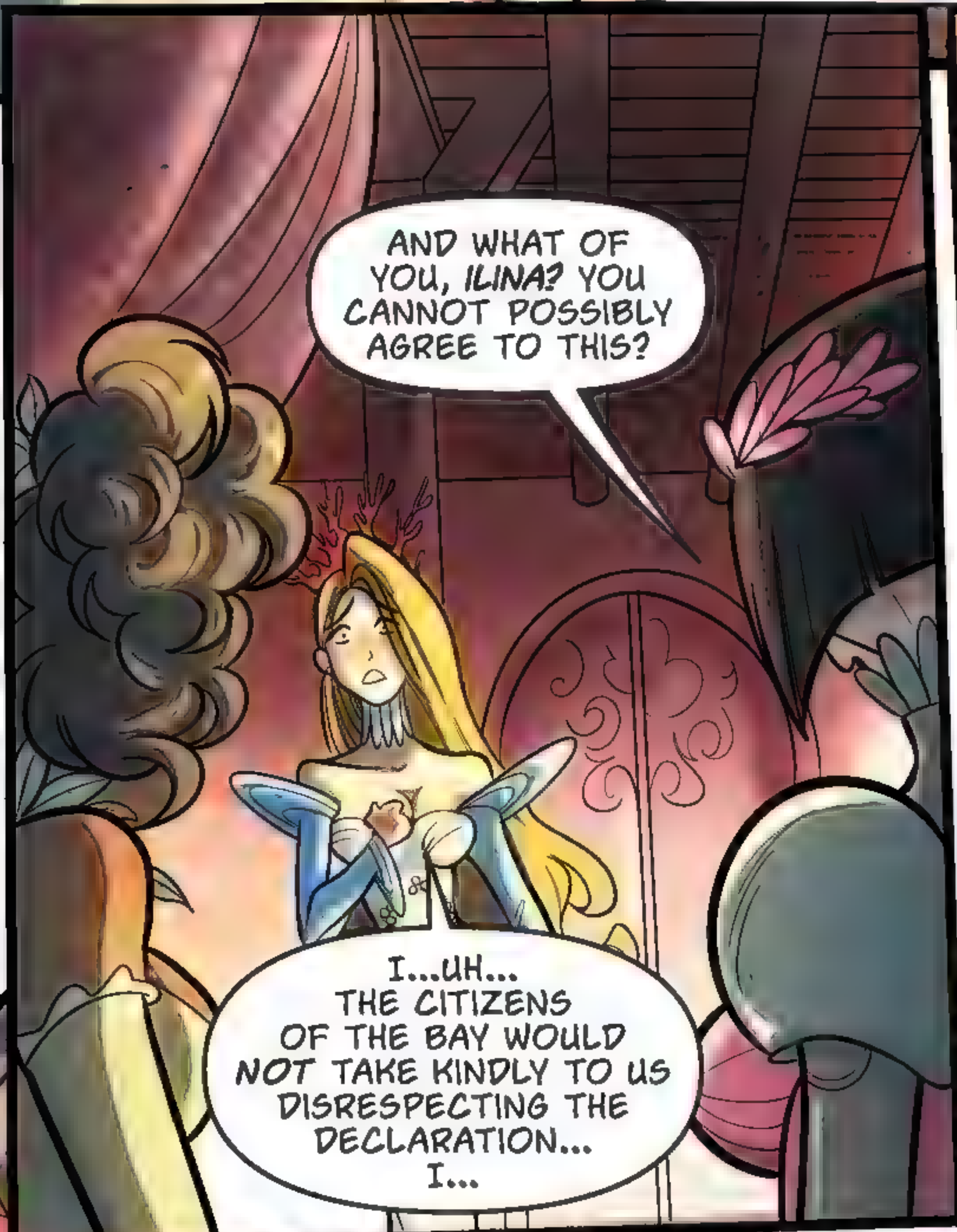


AND YOU
WOULD SO EASILY OFF
ONE OF US?

IT IS NOT MY
DECISION. WE MADE
A PACT TO RESPECT THEIR
LAST WISH BEFORE THEY
PASSED. WHOM ARE WE TO
OVERRIDE? ON WHOSE
AUTHORITY?



ON WHOSE AUTHORITY? HOW ABOUT THE
FIVE RULERS OF THIS LAND? WE ARE IN
COMMAND, LEST WE FORGET.



AND WHAT OF
YOU, ILINA? YOU
CANNOT POSSIBLY
AGREE TO THIS?

I...UH...
THE CITIZENS
OF THE BAY WOULD
NOT TAKE KINDLY TO US
DISRESPECTING THE
DECLARATION...
I...



I CANNOT BELIEVE
THIS. YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED
OF YOURSELVES! I WOULD RATHER
DEFY EVERY LAST CITIZEN IN THE
MAIDEN ISLANDS BEFORE
HARMING BETHANY.



KIM...
I WOULD
NEVER ASK
YOU TO DEF--

--SILENCE, BETHANY.
DO NOT SPEAK ANOTHER
WORD. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO
PLEA FOR YOUR LIFE LIKE SOME
SLAVE. YOU ARE THE RULER OF
EVANFAR, AND BY PROXY
THE FIVE REALMS.



CORRECTION--



--SHE WAS
THE RULER OF
THE FIVE.

GUARDS!

WAIT.



ON SECOND
THOUGHT, MAYBE I WAS
WRONG ABOUT BARRA NOT
BEING SO ANNOYING. MAYBE,
I WAS WRONG ABOUT
EVERYTHING.



GUARDS--
PLEASE PLACE
BETHANY UNDER THE
KEEP'S WATCH UNTIL
THIS MESS CAN BE
SORTED OUT.



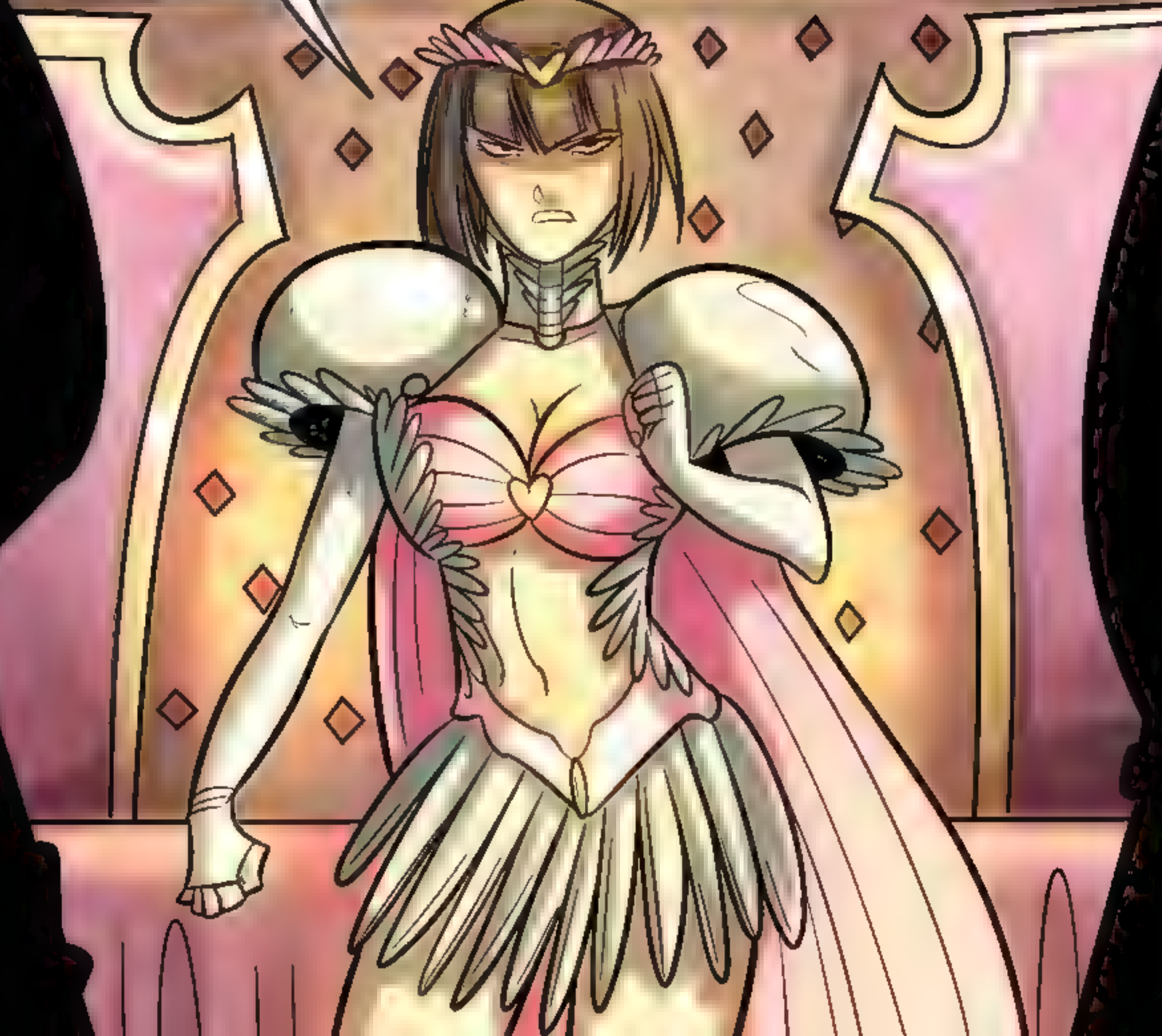
END
THIS AT
ONCE, BARRA!
WE DO NOT ALL
AGREE TO
THIS!

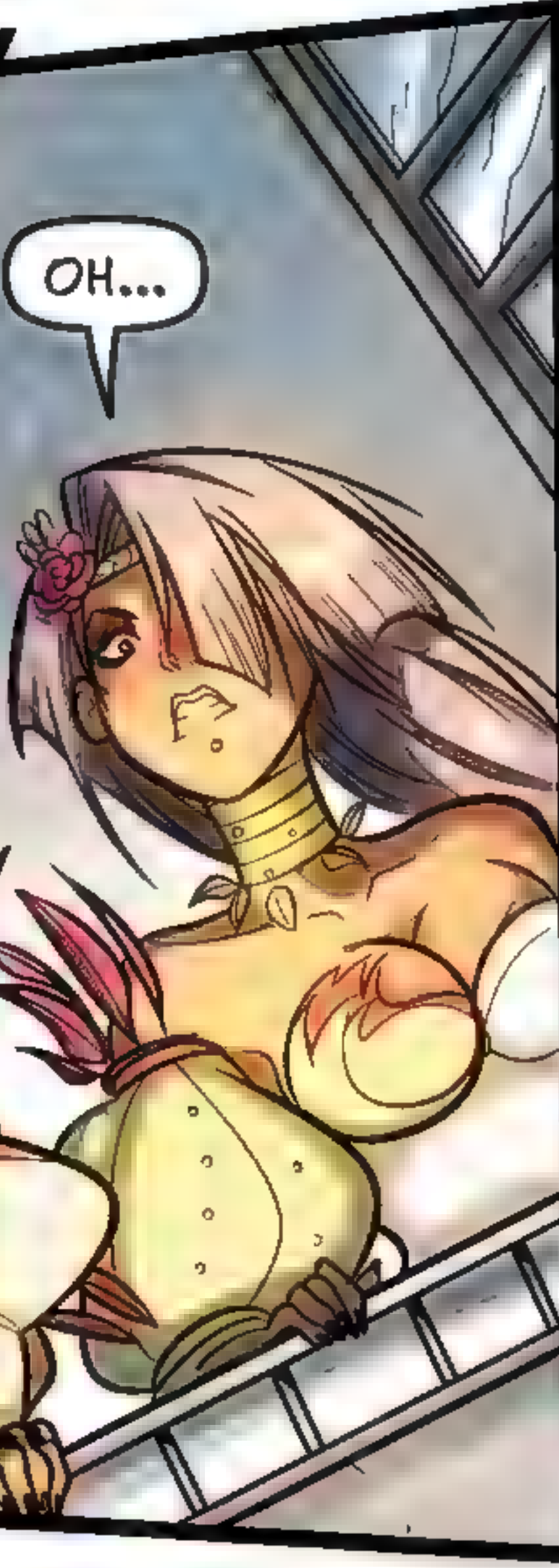
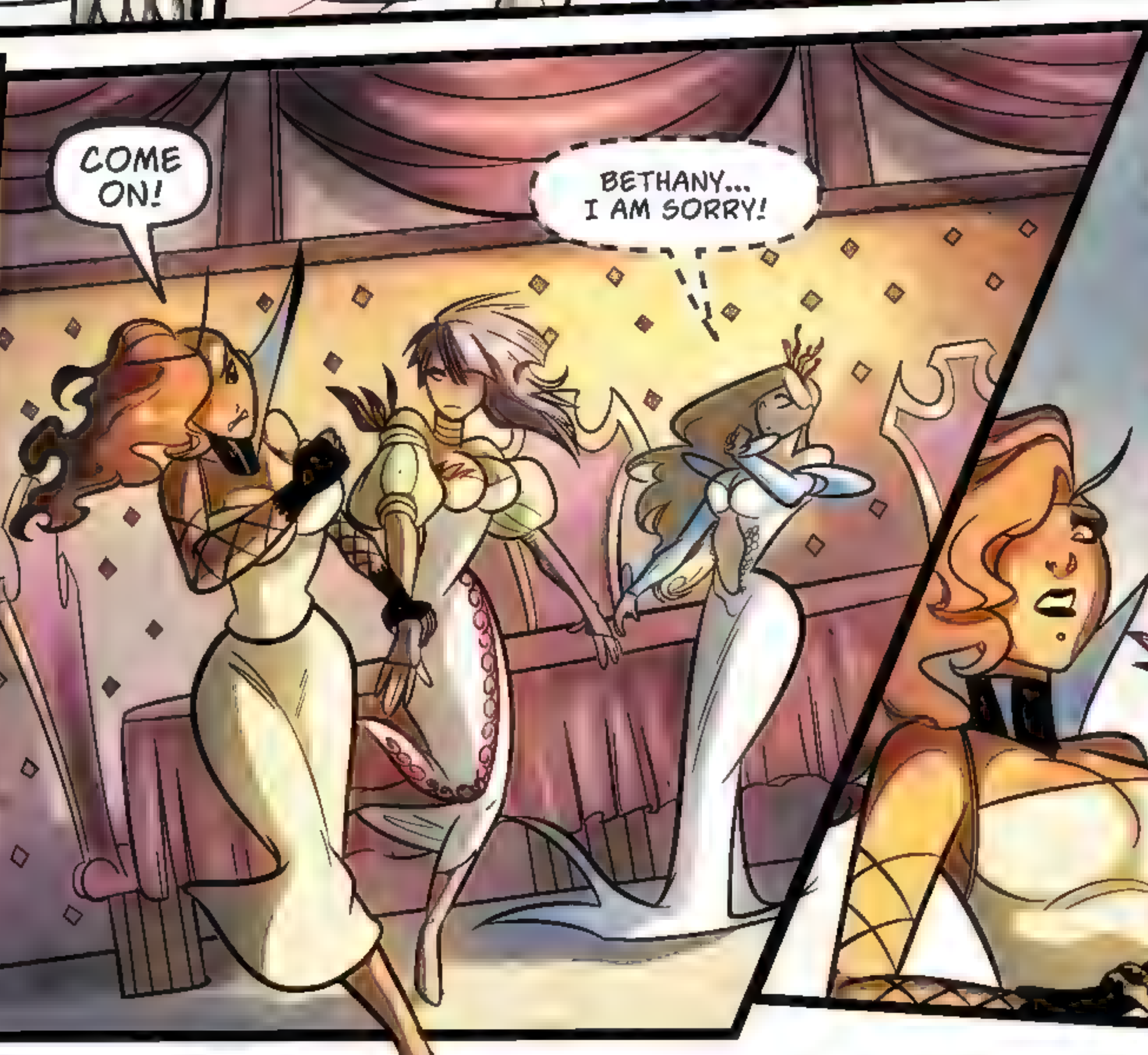
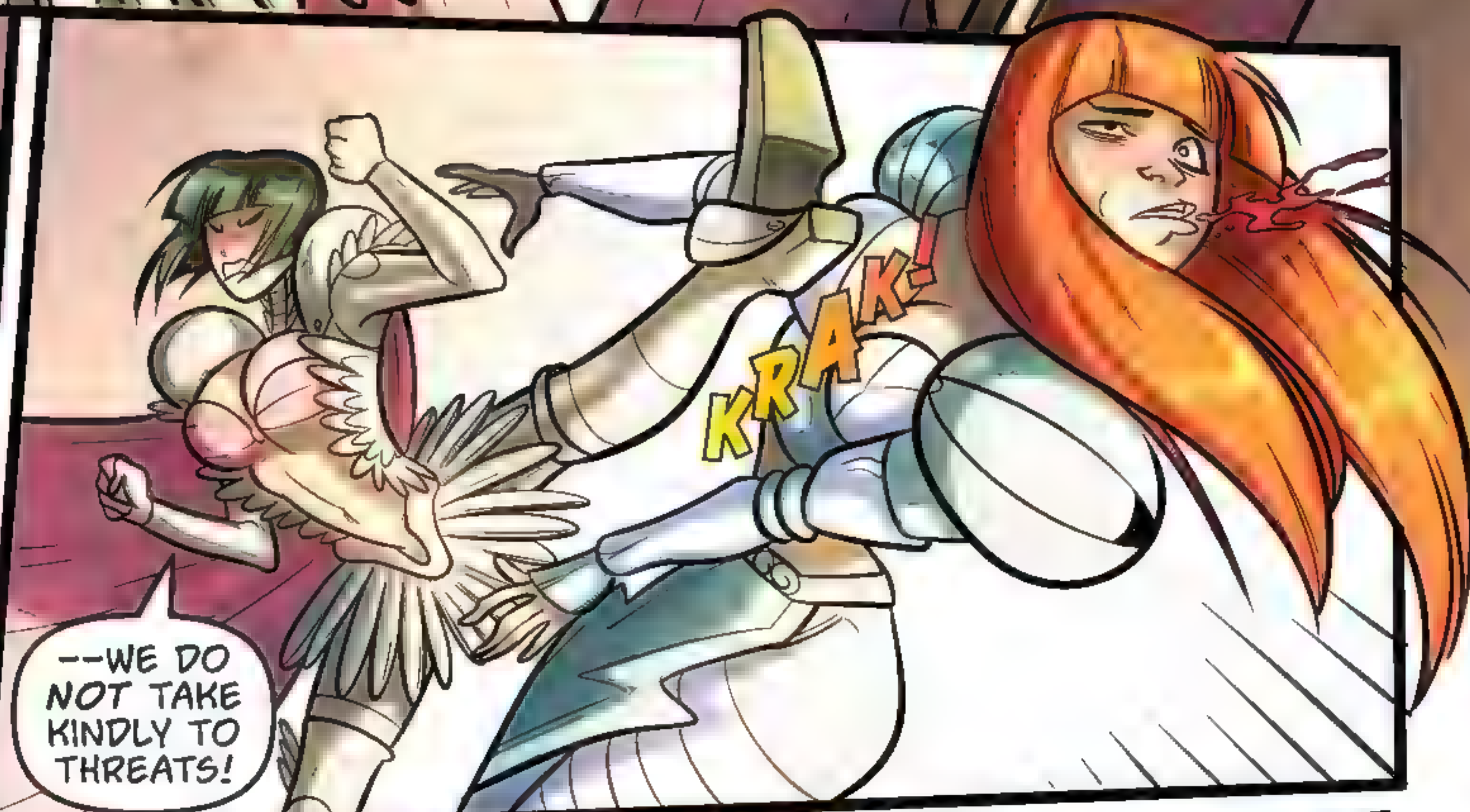
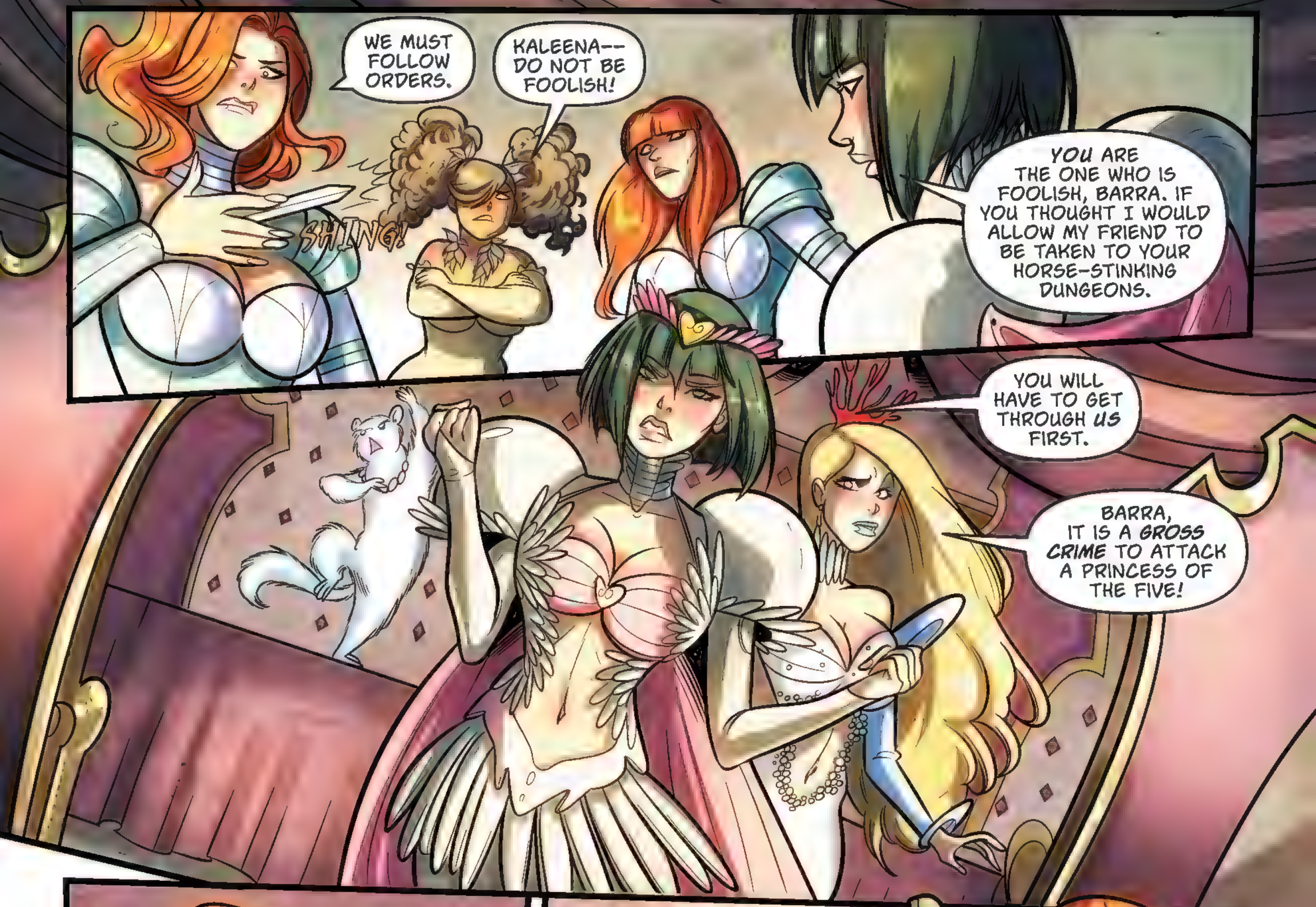
IT DOES NOT MATTER
WHAT YOU AGREE WITH.
YOU CONSENTED TO THIS
DECLARATION BY *SHOWING*
UP! WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION
TO SERVE THE CITIZENS OF
THE FIVE, NOT TO ONE
PERSON.

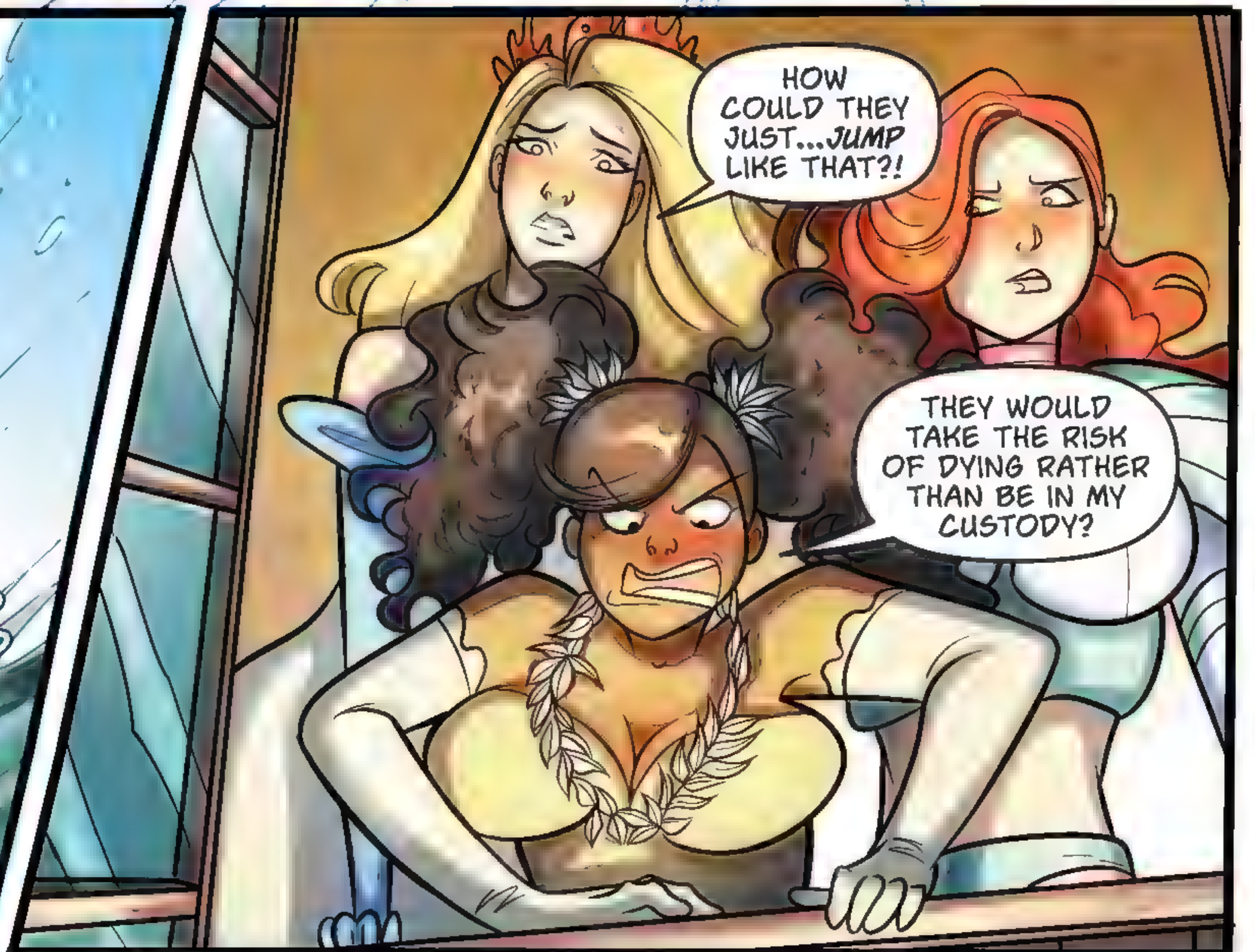


WAIT...

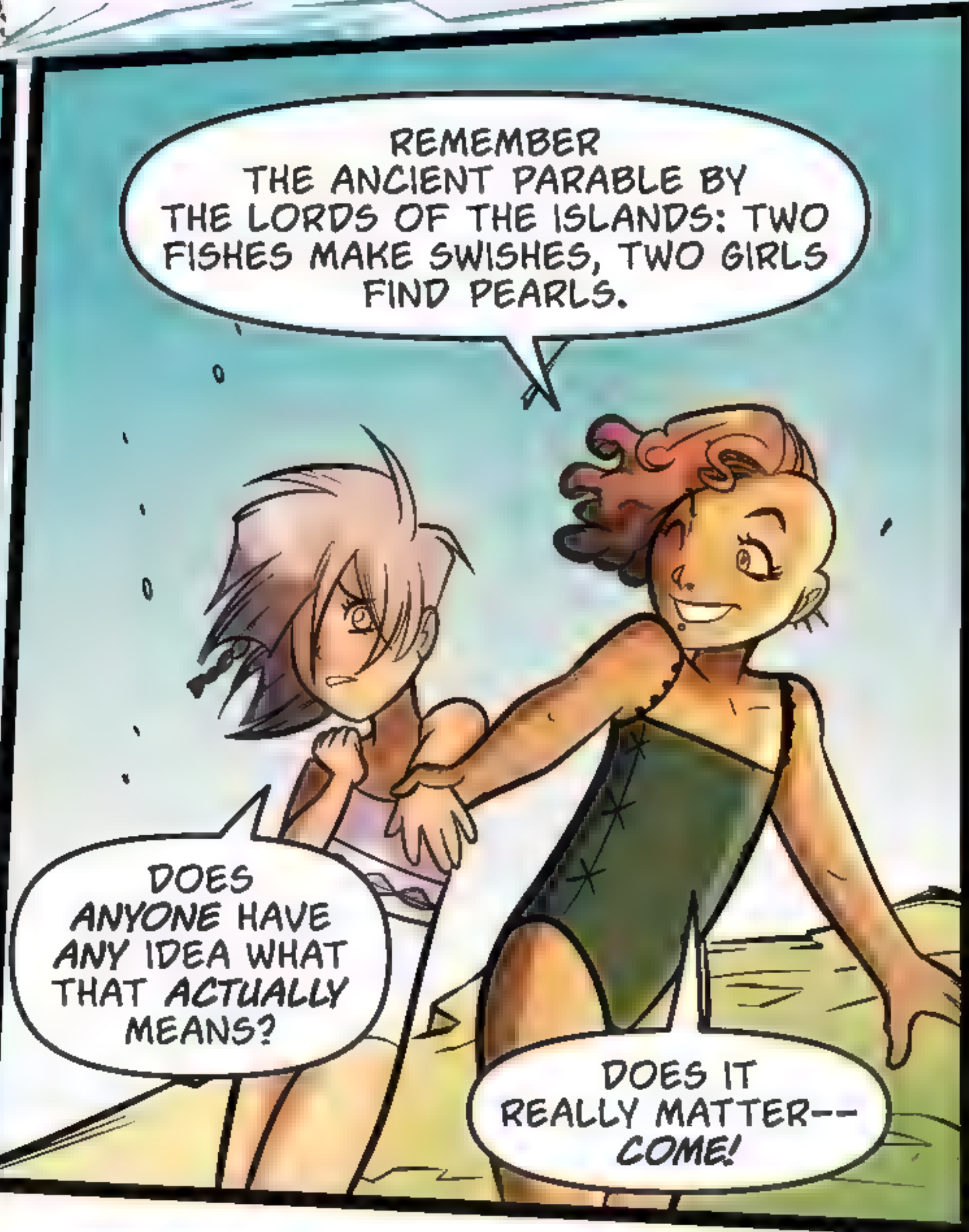
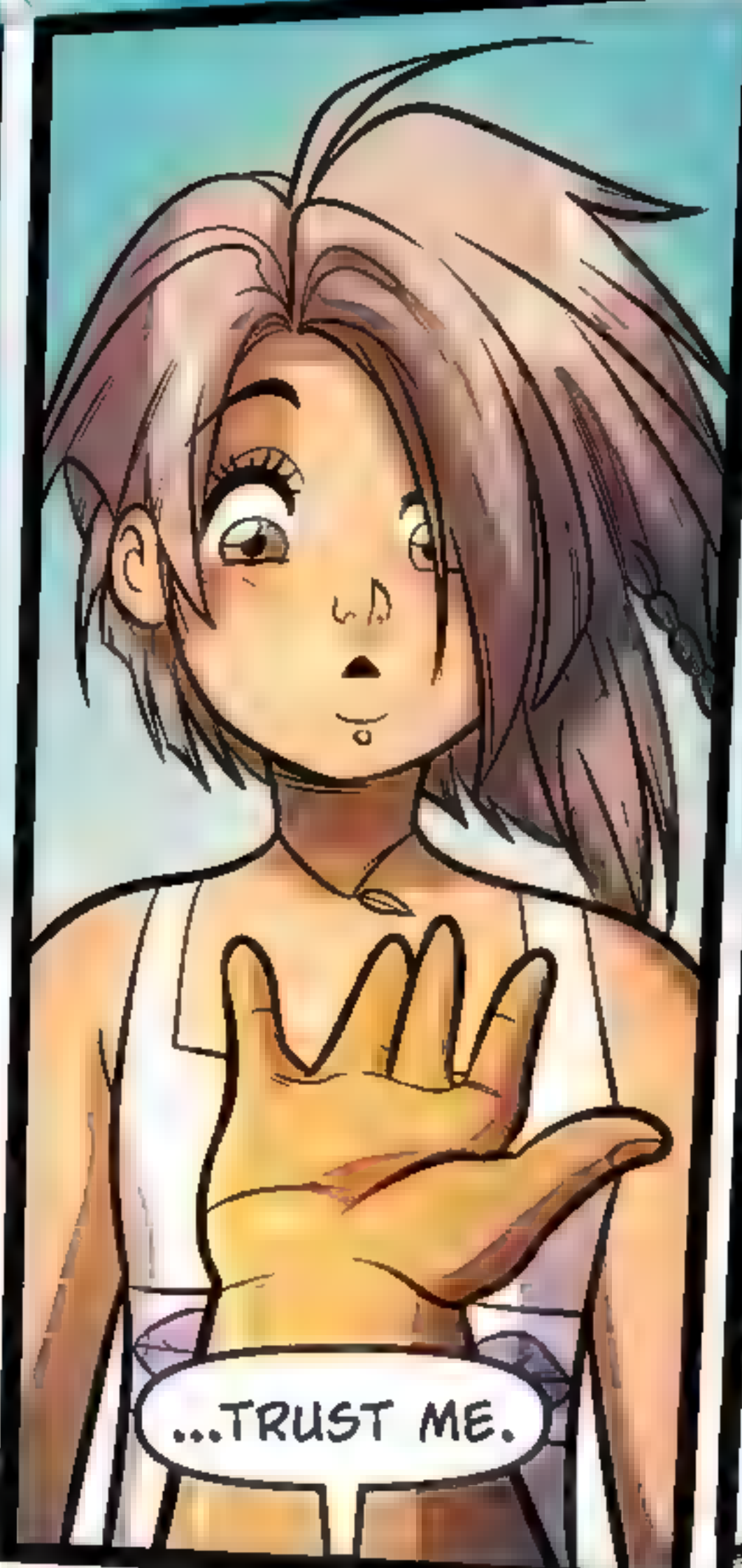
THIS IS
NOT RIGHT...AND I
WILL NOT LET YOU
TAKE HER.

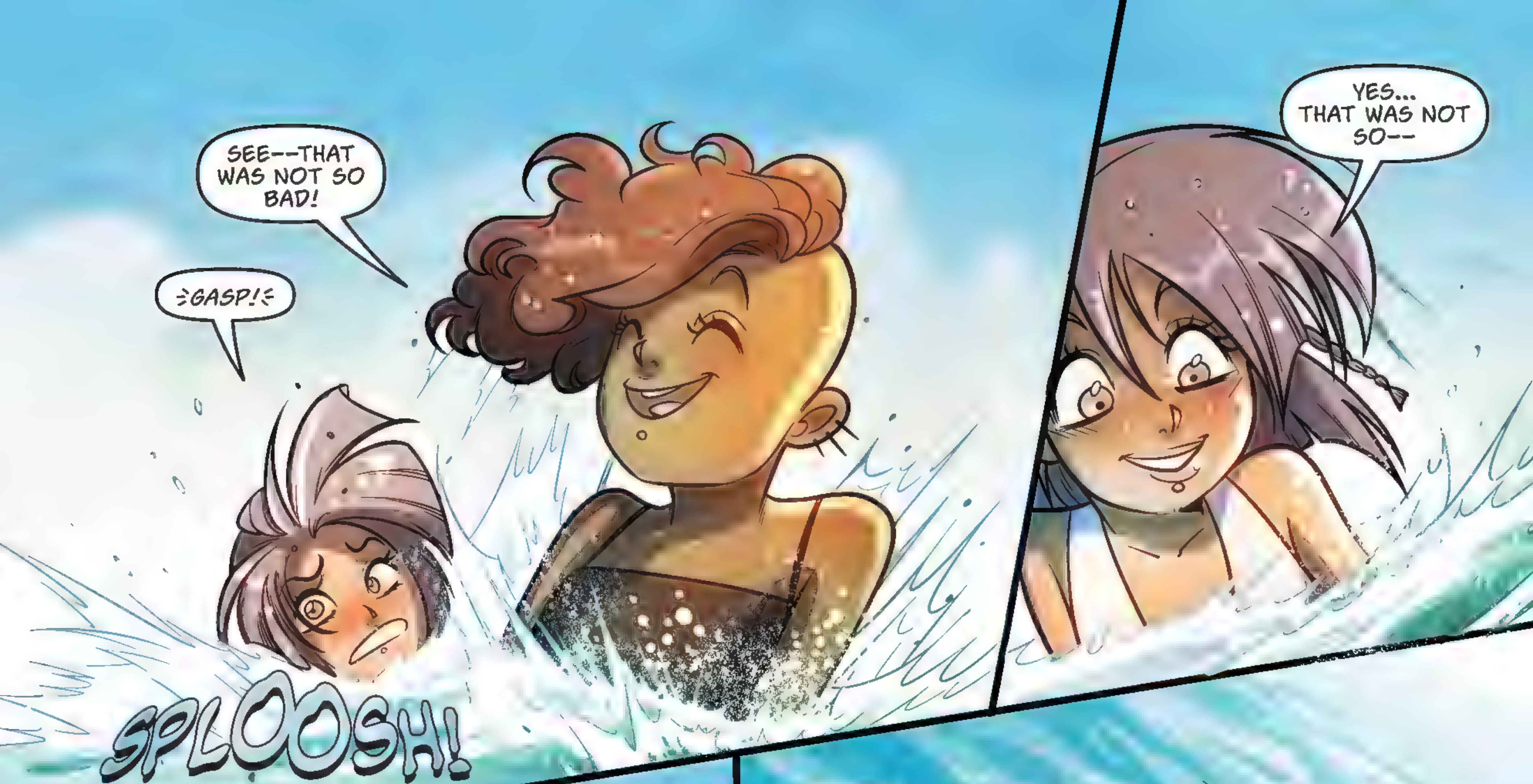






FINNSPORT, THE MAIDEN ISLANDS.
THEN.

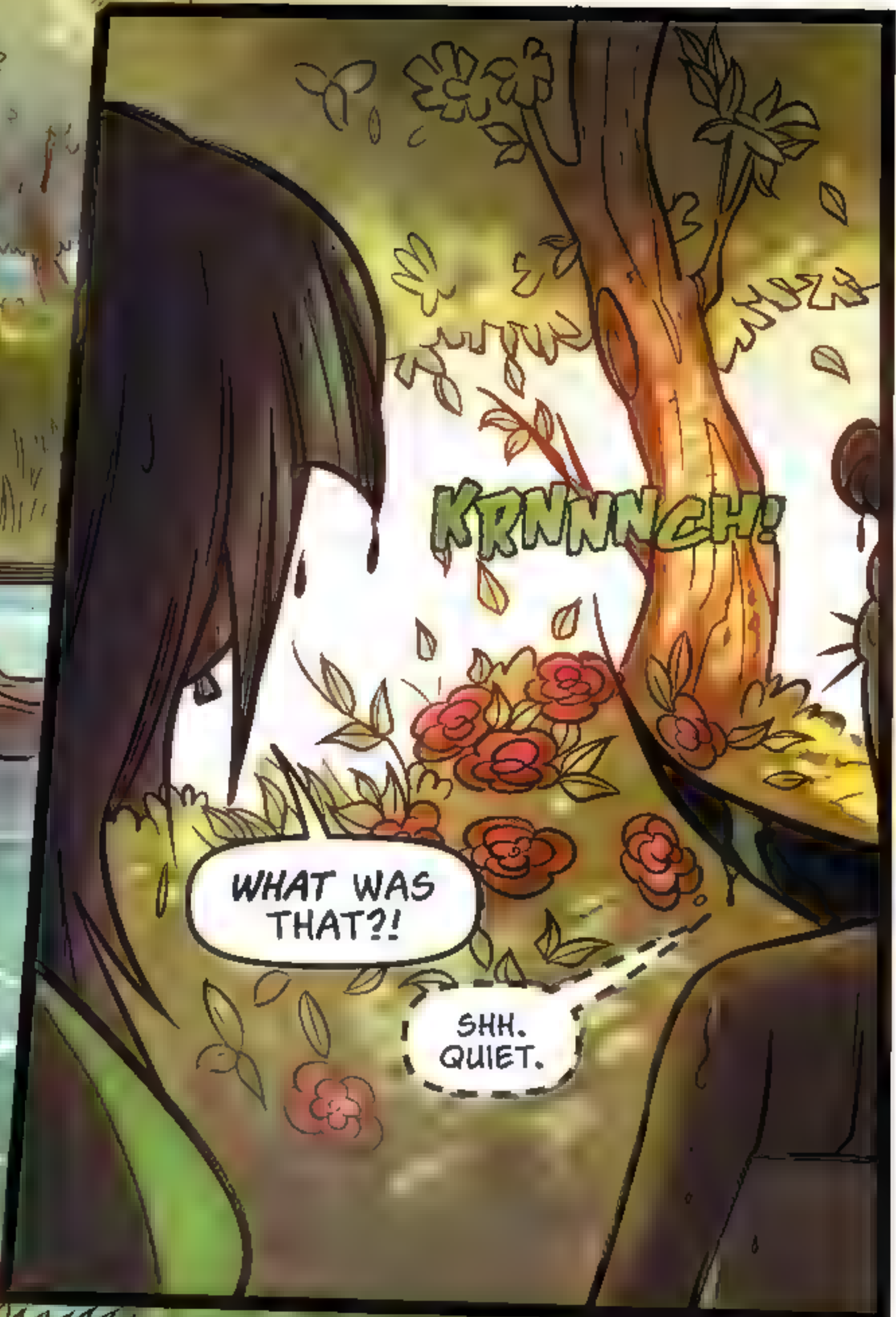






FIRST MY LIFE IS OVER. NOW THIS DRESS IS RUINED. MY SEAMSTRESS IS GOING TO HAVE MY HEAD.

DARRIA IS THE LEAST OF YOUR CONCERNS--WE HAVE TO GET OFF THESE GROUNDS AS HASTILY AS POSSIBLE. LIRA CAN FIND ME FROM THE SHORE.

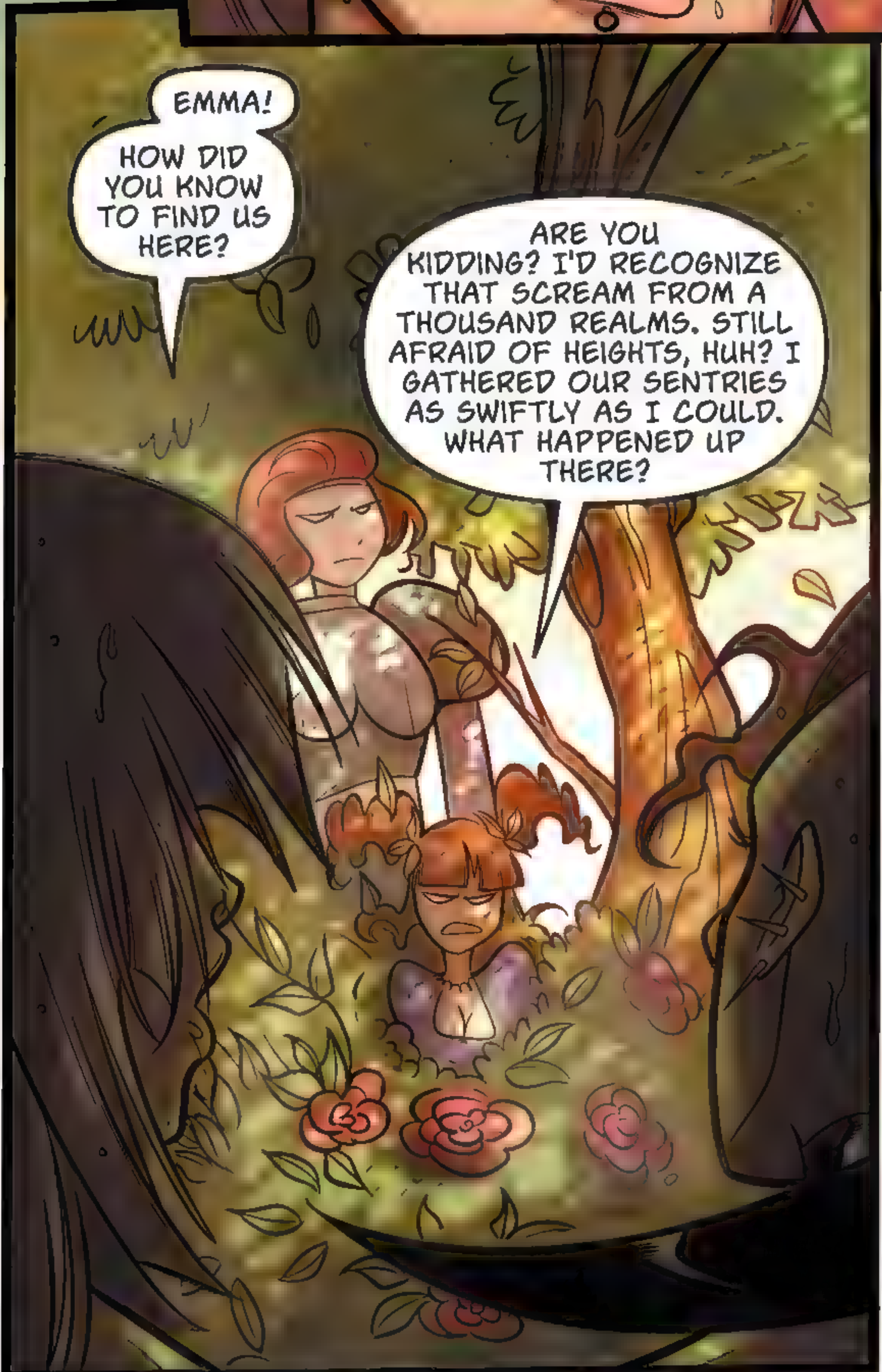


WHAT WAS THAT?!

SHH. QUIET.



SHHNNK



EMMA!
HOW DID YOU KNOW TO FIND US HERE?

ARE YOU KIDDING? I'D RECOGNIZE THAT SCREAM FROM A THOUSAND REALMS. STILL AFRAID OF HEIGHTS, HUH? I GATHERED OUR SENTRIES AS SWIFTLY AS I COULD. WHAT HAPPENED UP THERE?



ANOTHER TIME. WE HAVE TO MOVE, WE HAVE PRECIOUS FEW MOMENTS BEFORE BARRA'S SOLDIERS DASH FOR THIS LOCATION. WE MUST MAKE FOR MAIDEN HARBOR. THANK YOU, EMMA.

FOLLOW US. WE HAVE CLEARED AN EXIT STRATEGY.

GATHER THE REST OF OUR LADIES AND FIND THEM! TAKE ILINA'S WOMEN AS WELL!

KALEENA-- YOU STRUCK ONE OF MY GUARDS. I SHOULD HAVE YOU APPREHENDED!

OH, PLEASE-- AND WHO WOULD OUTFIT YOUR SOLDIERS WITH ARMOR AND WEAPONS FROM NOW ON? DO NOT SPEAK FALSE THREATS, BARRA. YOUR TROLLISH SENTRIES WILL SURVIVE. ALTHOUGH, THE PASTY ONE MAY NEED TO TEND TO THAT FERRET BITE.

THIS ENTIRE SITUATION IS OUT OF CONTROL.

WE HAD IT UNDER CONTROL UNTIL YOU LET THEM GO, KALEENA! YOU ARE THE PRINCESS OF HEAVEN'S FORGE. YOUR FATHER WAS A HIGH PRIESTEN-- YOU KNOW BETTER THAN MOST WHAT THE LAW DICTATES!

NOW, WITH THOSE CRIMINALS ON THE LOOSE THERE IS NO TELLING WHERE THEY COULD GO!

DO NOT REFER TO THEM AS CRIMINALS. THE LORDS--OR BETTER YET, THE FOOLISH DYING MEN--MAY HAVE ASKED FOR HER TO BE SACRIFICED, YET, IT IS NOT A SIN TO ALLOW THEM A FIGHTING CHANCE!

IT WILL BE IN THE EYES OF THE PEOPLE. YOU HAVE PLACED US IN AN UNFATHOMABLE POSITION IN OUR KINGDOMS. WE ANSWER TO OUR CITIZENS, DO NOT FORGET.

YOU HAVE GIVEN THEM A CHANCE TO FLEE, BUT THAT IS WHERE IT ENDS, KALEENA. MY LADIES WILL FIND THEM BOTH AND FOLLOW THE OATH WE ALL PLEDGED TO UPHOLD. THE BOTH OF YOU CAN EITHER ASSIST THE KEEP IN SAID CAUSE, OR IDLE CLEAR OF OUR PATH.

YOU MAY REQUIRE THEIR SERVITUDE TO PROP YOUR FRAGILE EGO, BUT I RULE MY PEOPLE. IF THEY DO NOT TENDER THEIR UNDERSTANDING, I WILL OFFER THEM THE SWORD.

AND, IF THEY RISE UP?

I HAVE MANY SWORDS.

PROCLAIM ALL THE THREATS YOU WANT, PRINCESS, YET NEVER CEASE TO OVERLOOK HOW TRULY FAR YOU ARE FROM THE GREAT KEEP.

YOU PROBABLY
CONSIDER ME A FOOL
FOR ALLOWING THEM TO
FLEE. I DO NOT BLAME
YOU. IT WAS SILLY OF ME.
YET... MY RELATIONSHIP
WITH BETHANY HAS
ALWAYS BEEN...

THEN.

...COMPLICATED.

BETHANY? SO
HERE YOU HIDE.
I HAVE SEARCHED
HEAVEN'S DEN IN ITS
ENTIRETY LOOKING
FOR YOU.

APOLOGIES...
IT IS...THE
VIEW. SO...

BREATHTAKING?

YES.

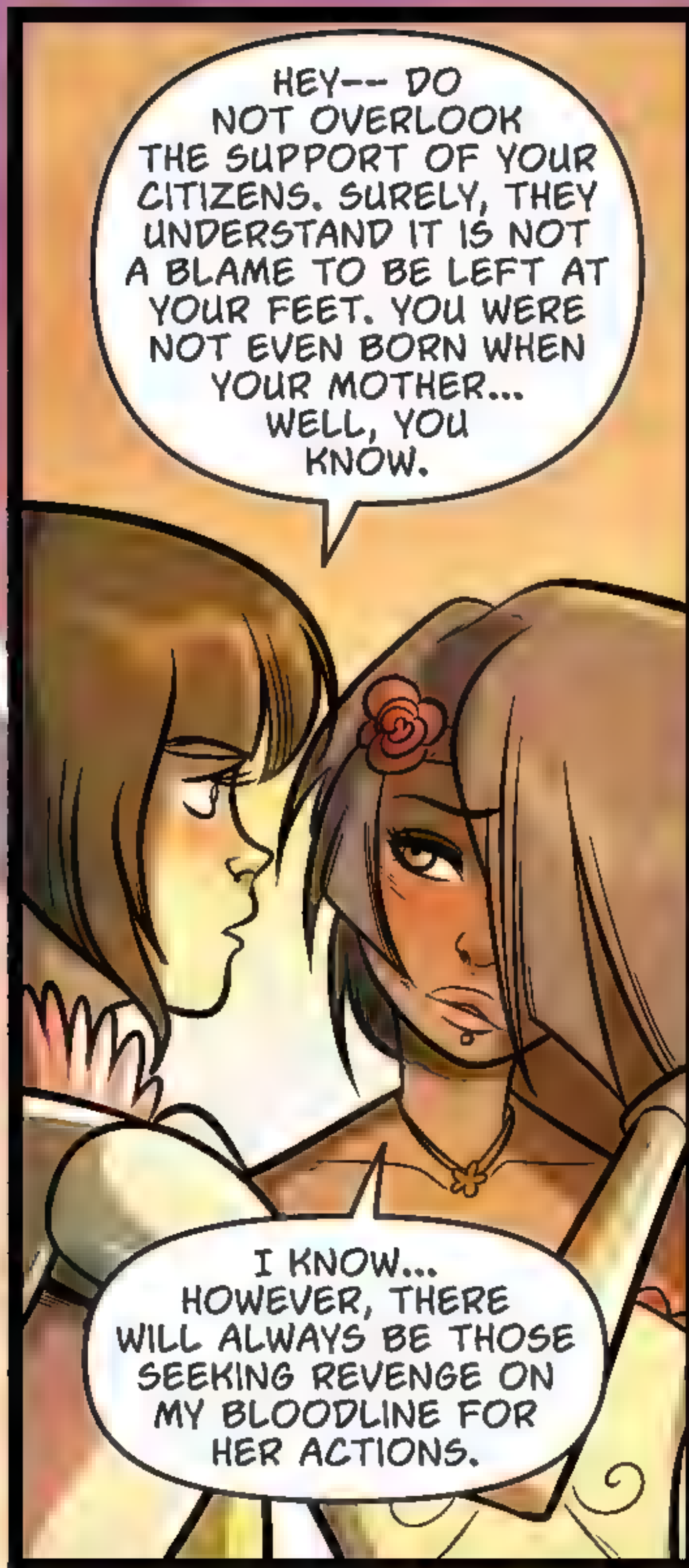
I AM GLAD YOU
COULD MAKE IT SOUTH,
THIS TIME. WE RARELY SEE
EACH OTHER ANYMORE, YET WE
ARE NEIGHBORING KINGDOMS.
THERE IS CALAMITY IN
THAT.

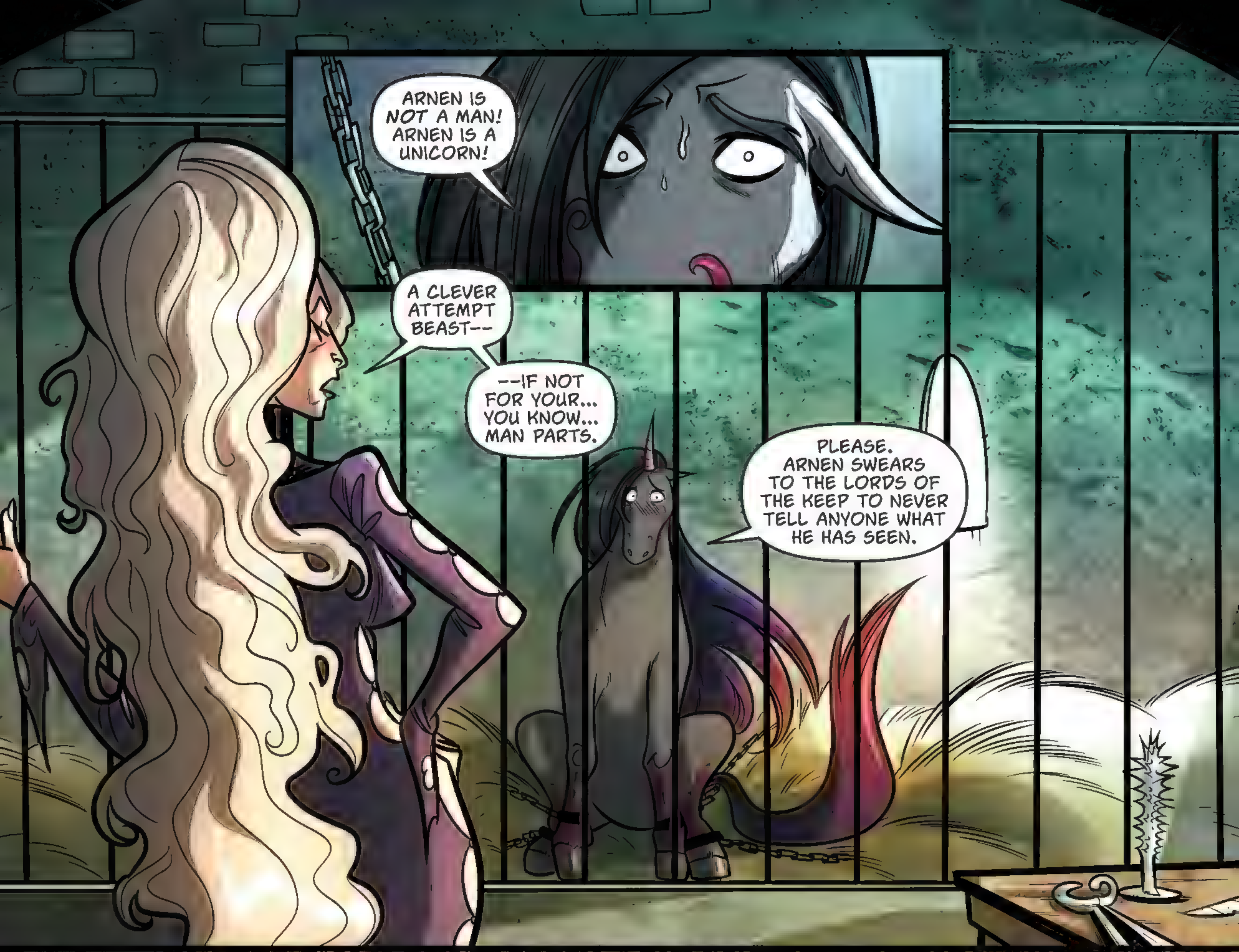
IT IS MY FAULT.
EVANFAR HAS TAKEN
EVERY LAST FREE MOMENT
OF MY TIME. NEVER A DULL
MOMENT IN THE
KINGDOM.

MY RELATION
TO THAT STRESS
IS PALPABLE.

THERE HAS
NOT BEEN A MALE
BORN IN NEARLY A
DECADE, KALEENA. I CAN
FEEL THE PATIENCE OF
THE FIVE REALMS IS
GROWING THIN...

...SOON,
THEY WILL BEGIN
TO LAY BLAME ON
WHOMEVER THEY CAN.
THE ONLY PLACE
TO LOOK IS
UP.





ARNEN IS NOT A MAN!
ARNEN IS A UNICORN!

A CLEVER ATTEMPT BEAST--

--IF NOT FOR YOUR... YOU KNOW... MAN PARTS.

PLEASE. ARNEN SWEARS TO THE LORDS OF THE KEEP TO NEVER TELL ANYONE WHAT HE HAS SEEN.



OH, OF THIS I AM SURE. TRUST ME.



ARNEN CANNOT. ARNEN HAS... TRUST ISSUES.

IS THAT SO?

YES... IT HAS BEEN SO AS LONG AS ARNEN CAN REMEMBER.



WE ARE NOT STRANGERS IN THIS REGARD, UNICORN. I LEARNED TRUST IS ONLY A DIM FALSEHOOD BRED BY ONLY THE MOST NAÏVE OF BELIEVERS. NO...



...THE ONLY TRUTH IN THIS LIFE IS TRAGEDY.



ARNEN
HAS HEARD LEGEND
OF YOUR POTIONS AND
CURSES... AND
TORTURE.

TELL ME,
WHAT LIES HAVE YOU
OVERHEARD?

ARNEN
NEED NOT QUOTE LIES.
ARNEN HAS TROTTED A LIFETIME
SURROUNDED ONLY BY FEMALES.
SEEN FIRSTHAND THE RESULT
OF YOUR DOING.



AND...WHAT IS
YOUR DEFINITION
OF TORTURE?



...
SOMETHING...
PAINFUL.



VERY GOOD. THE
INFLECTION OF PAIN IS
A NECESSARY INGREDIENT
IN EVERY PERSECUTION
METHOD DEVISED.



BUT,
TORTURE IS ALSO
TIME...

...ENDLESS TIME.

YET, AFTER SO LONG...
I BEGAN TO RECALL MY
DEEP ADMIRATION FOR
COLLECTION IN MY YOUTH.
INSECTS, FAIRY WINGS,
PARRYWHISPERS-- I
GATHERED THEM ALL WHEN
I WAS JUST A CHILD.

I SPENT COUNTLESS
SUNRISES SEARCHING
TO FIND A CURE FOR
MY DISEASE. TO FIND
A WAY TO SAVE THE
MEN I HAD INFECTED.

MANY SEASONS
I SPENT HIDDEN AWAY
IN THIS CASTLE. A RELIC
OF THE WAR OF THE FIVE.
HIDDEN AWAY FROM
EVERYTHING I HELD DEAR,
WHICH ADMITTEDLY WAS
DWINDLING AT MY POINT
OF ARRIVAL.

ONLY, NOW,
MY DIVERSION
WAS MEN.

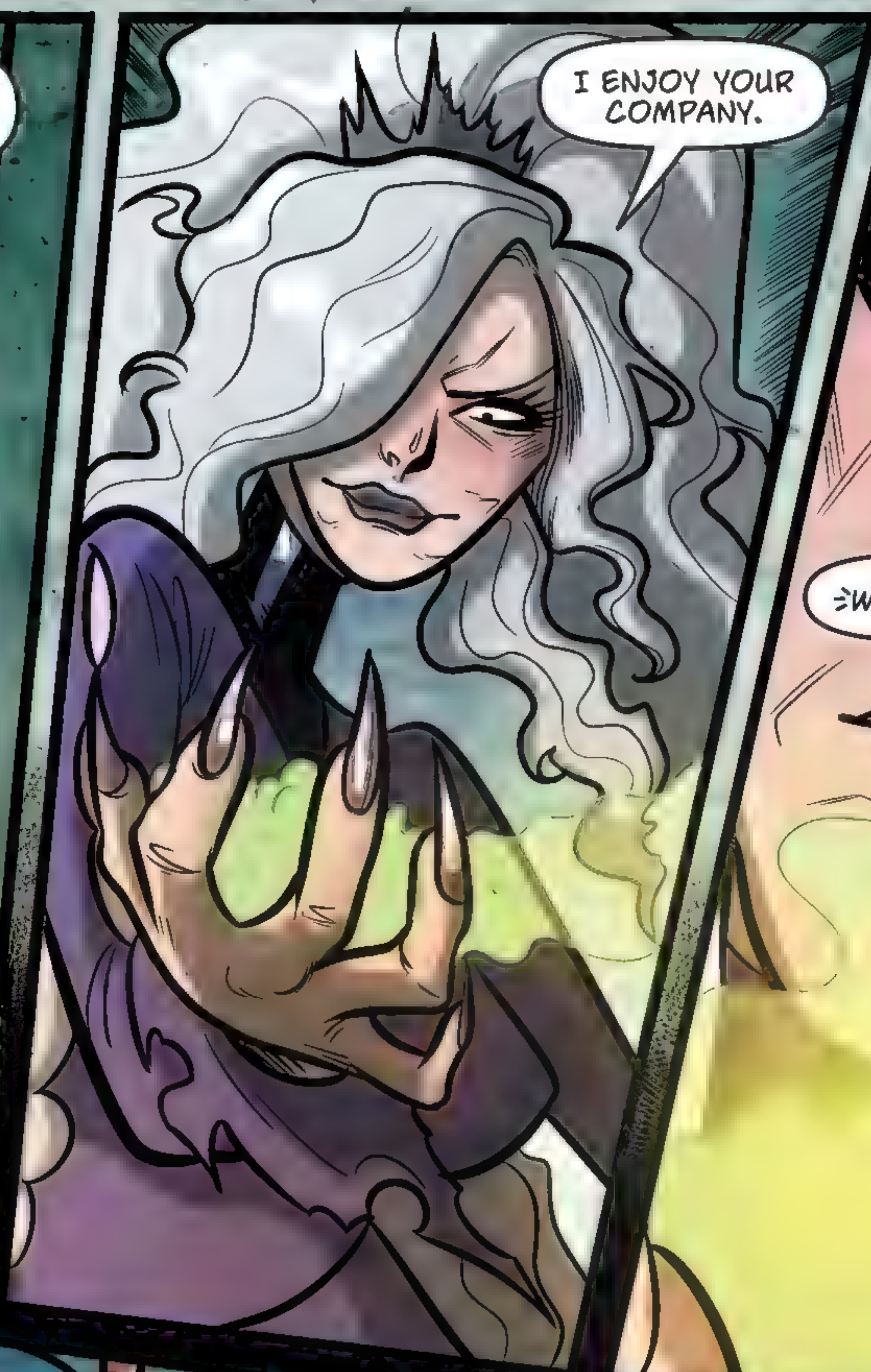
HOWEVER, FEAR DOES
NOT BREED UNDERSTANDING--
NOR FORGIVENESS.

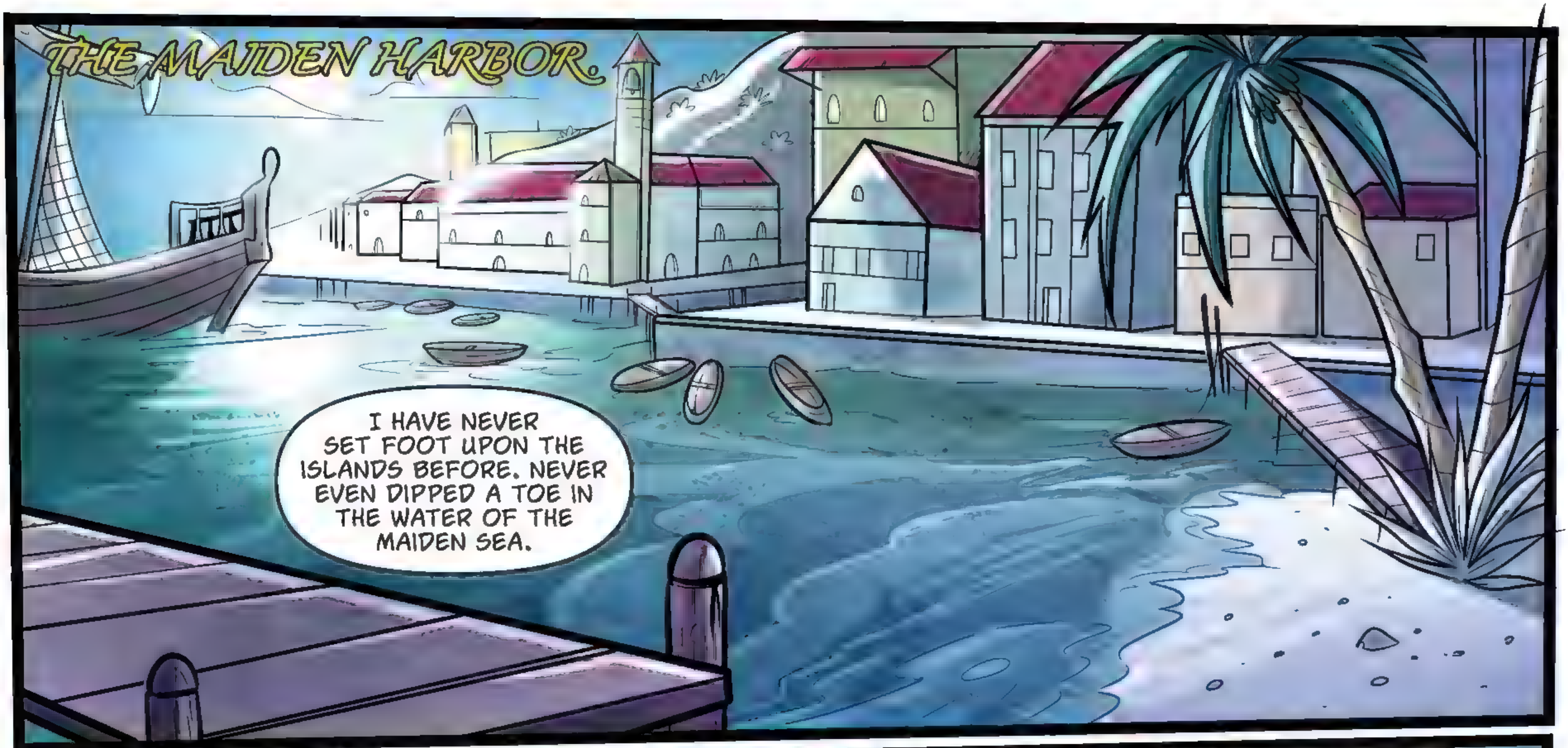
THERE IS SOMETHING
YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT
ME, UNICORN.

SOMETHING
I HAVE DISCOVERED ON
MY OWN AFTER ALL THIS TIME.
SOMETHING THOSE MEN THAT
NIGHT SOON FOUND OUT--
I AM NOT ALONE.

I NEVER WAS. AND
FURTHERMORE...

I AM
SOMETHING...
MORE.





THE MAIDEN HARBOR.

I HAVE NEVER SET FOOT UPON THE ISLANDS BEFORE. NEVER EVEN DIPPED A TOE IN THE WATER OF THE MAIDEN SEA.

KEEP QUIET. WITH ANY LUCK WE WILL BEAT THE ROOST AND ANY WAKING EYES.

APOLOGIES. I AM JUST ANXIOUS. I TEND TO GET TALKATIVE. I HAVE ALSO NEVER RIDDEN SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH TWO PRINCESSES. WHAT A SIGHT. MY MOTHER WOULD BE SO PROUD, LORDS BLESS HER INFURIATING SOUL.

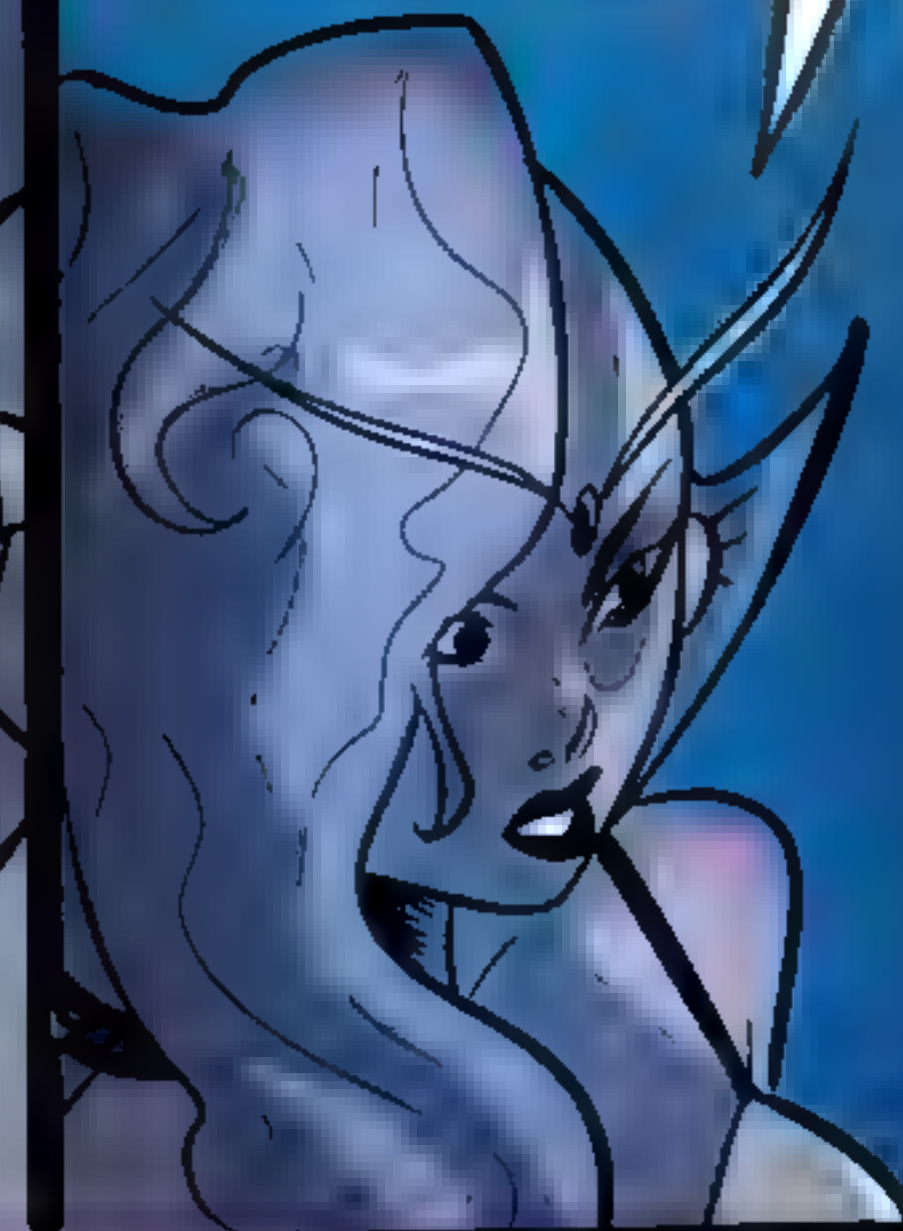
EVEN I WOULD TAKE SOLACE IN SEEING YOUR MOTHER AGAIN RIGHT ABOUT NOW, EMMA. YET, KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN.



WE SHOULD BE RETURNING TO EVANFAR. THE LONGER THE THRONE REMAINS EMPTY, THE HIGHER THE RISK THAT SOMEONE WILL ATTEMPT TO OCCUPY IT. WHAT THEN?

IT IS TOO LATE FOR THAT, BETHANY. DESPITE HER BLATHERING, ILINA WAS CORRECT BACK THERE--THE CITIZENS WILL NOT ADHERE TO VIOLATING THE DECLARATION OF THE DYING MEN. IT IS A LAW BY THE DIVINITY.

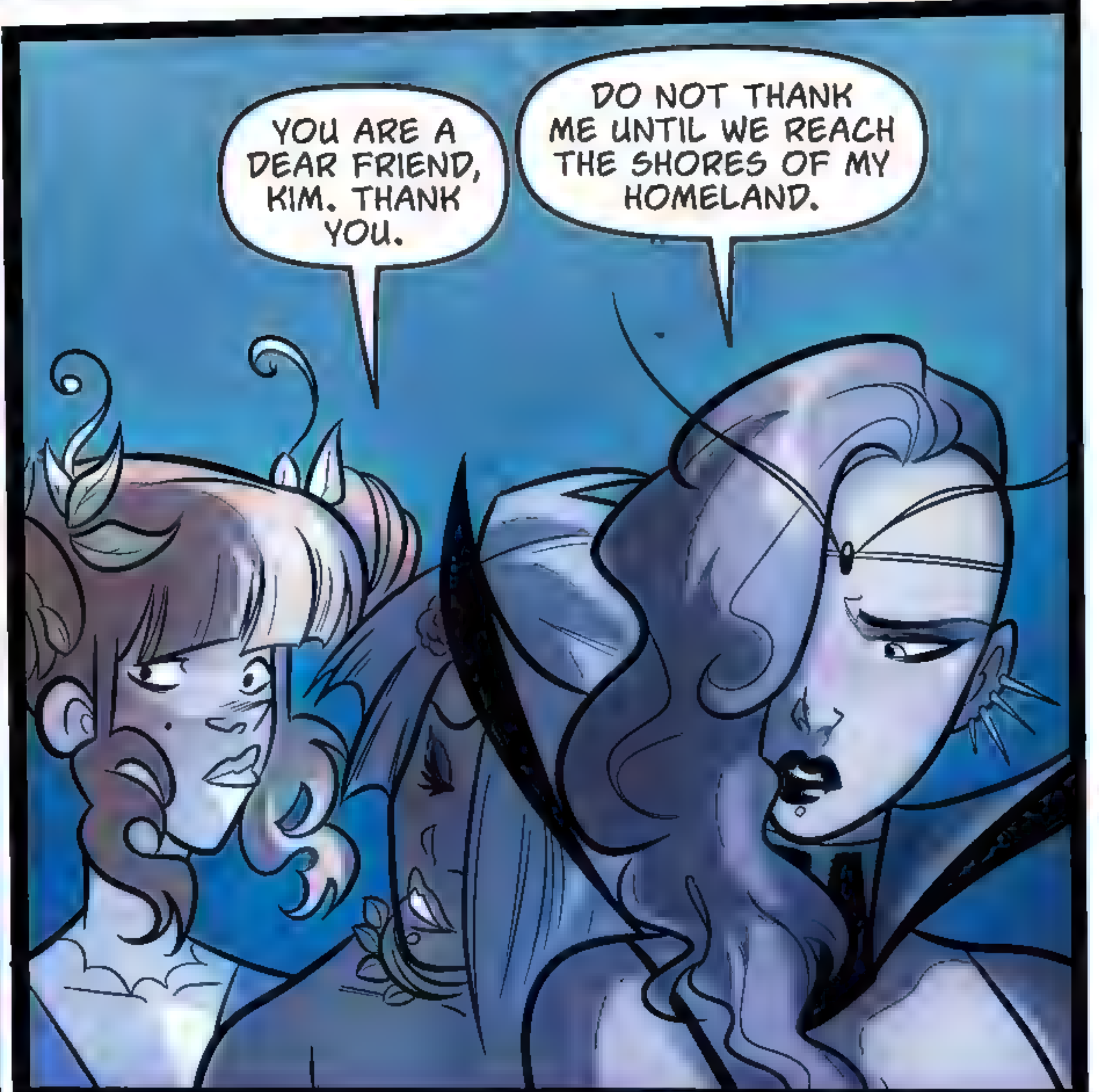
UNBREAKABLE. YOU NEED TO HIDE SOMEWHERE SAFE UNTIL THIS CAN BE SORTED OUT. THERE WILL BE NO POINT IN SAVING EVANFAR IF IT CEASES TO RECOGNIZE YOUR AUTHORITY.



MAY I ASK YOU SOMETHING, THEN?

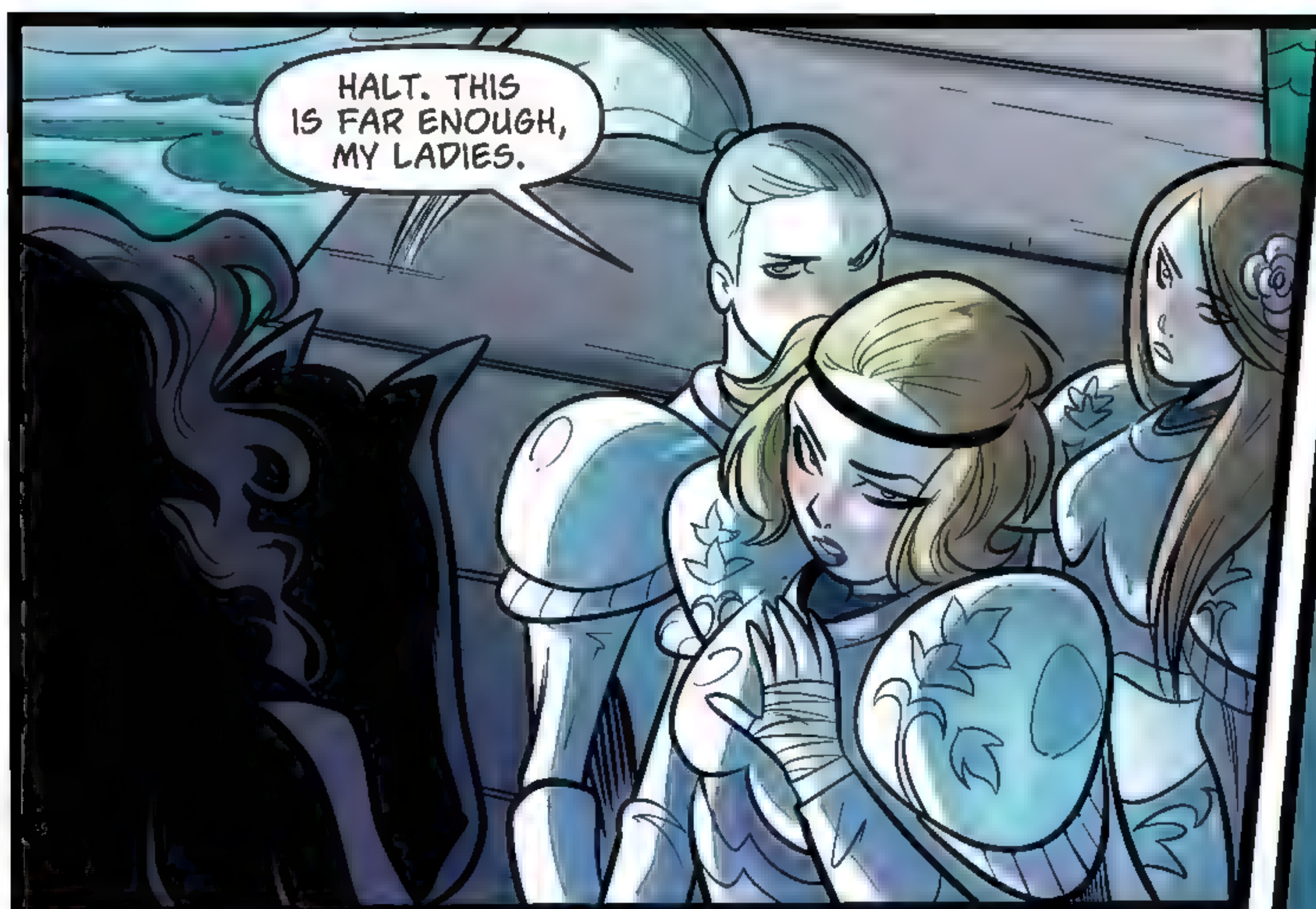
WHY DID YOU RISK EVERYTHING TO SAVE ME? THE NEWS WILL SOON GET OUT THAT YOU ARE HARBORING ME.

BECAUSE YOU ARE THE ONE TRUE HEIR OF EVANFAR... AND MORESO...YOU ARE MY FRIEND. AND, WE OF THE ISLANDS DO NOT WILLFULLY HARM THOSE WE CHERISH AT THE WHIM OF A DYING BREATH.



YOU ARE A DEAR FRIEND, KIM. THANK YOU.

DO NOT THANK ME UNTIL WE REACH THE SHORES OF MY HOMELAND.



GRAAAAAAAAAHHH!!

...BECAUSE,
OUR RIDE HAS
ARRIVED.

TO BE CONTINUED!

Damsels In Excess

Vol. 1 Part 2 of 5

LEAP OF FAITH

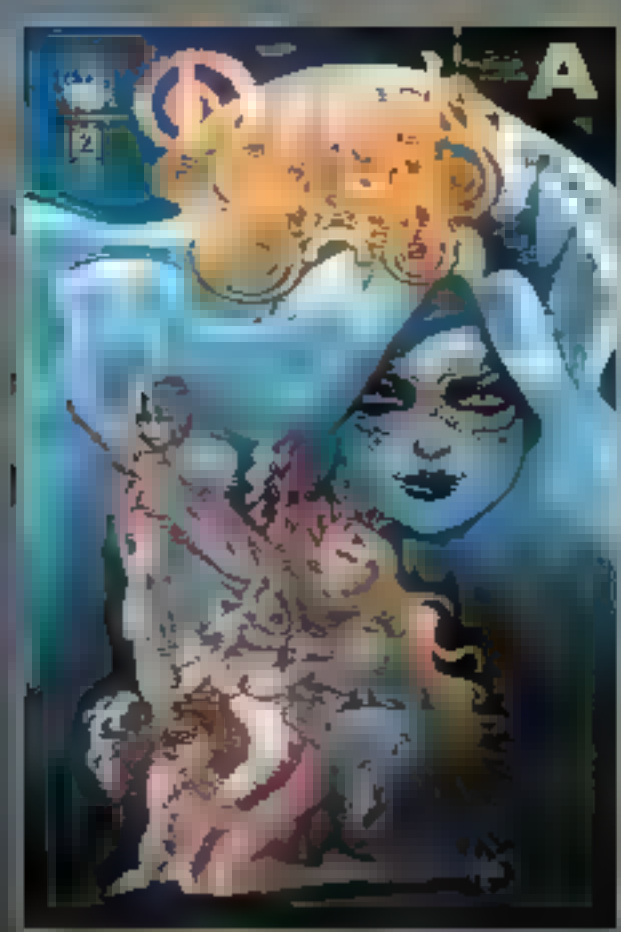
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Inked by
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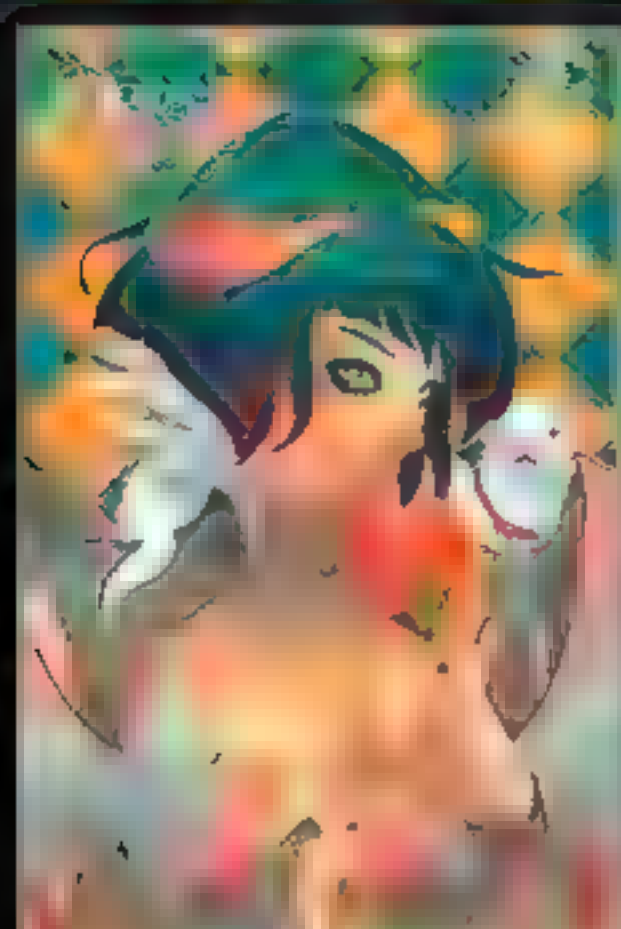
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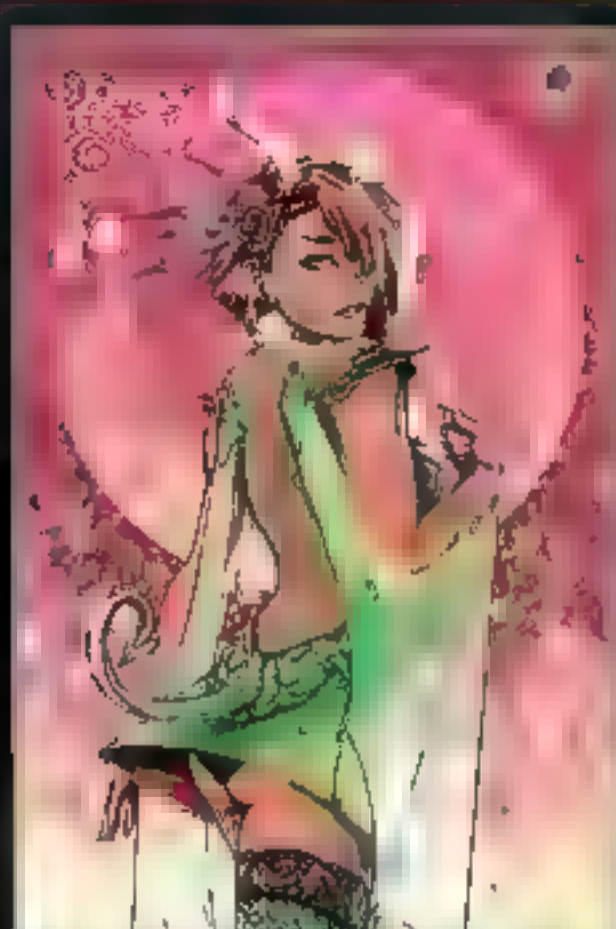
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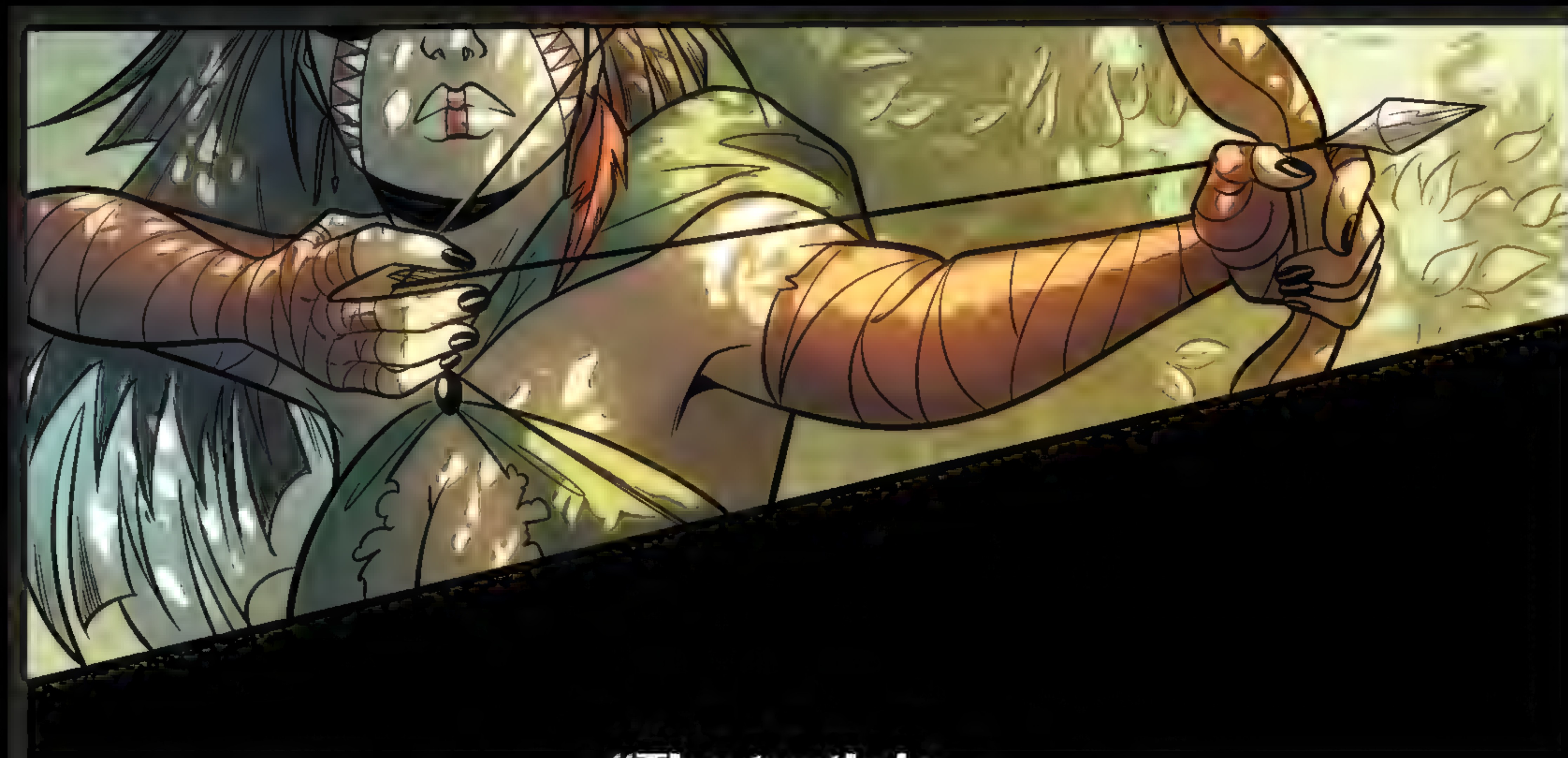
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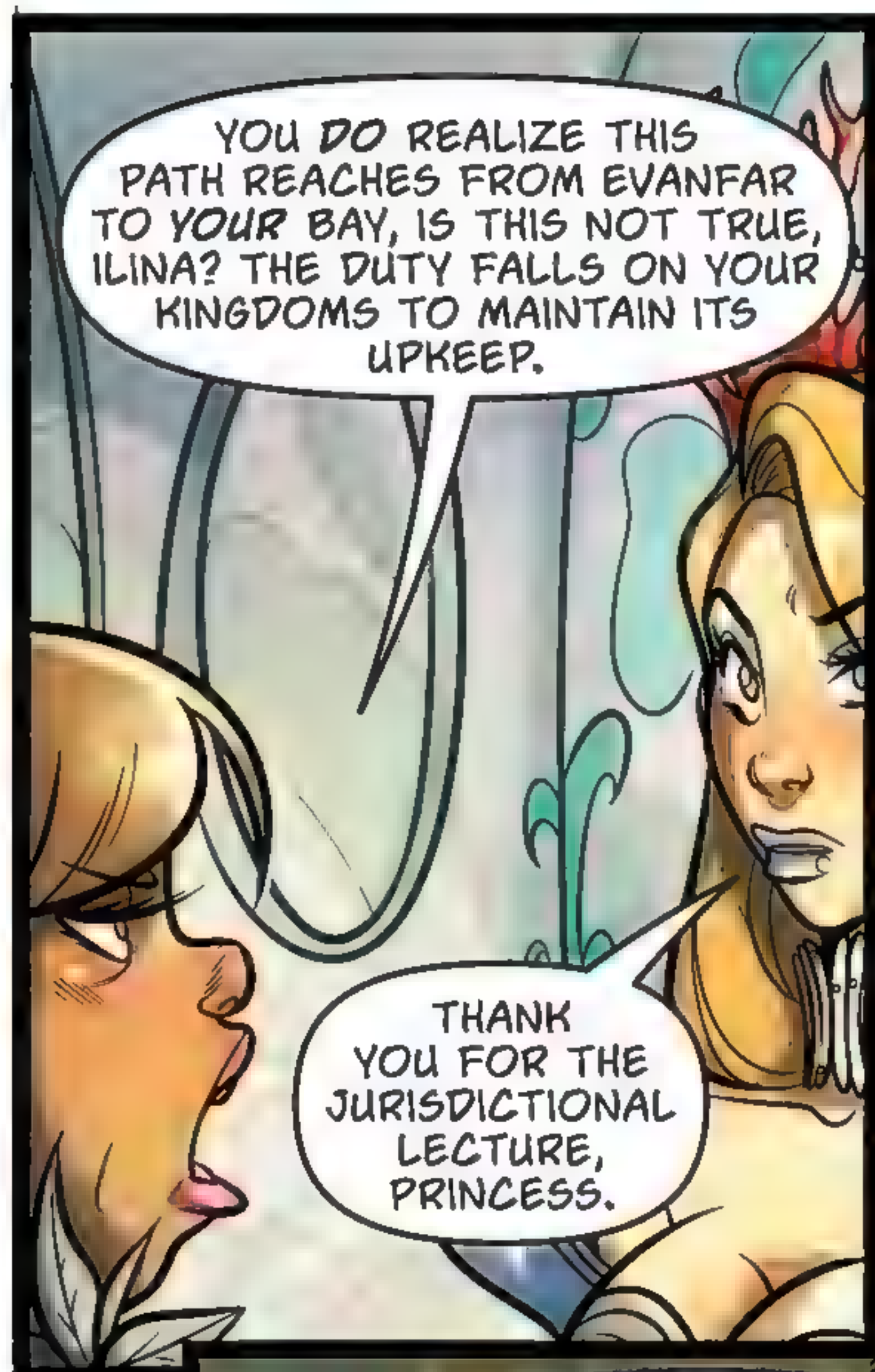
**“The truth is...
I knew this day would come.”**



I NEVER UNDERSTAND WHY I AM LOOKED UPON AS THE VILLAIN IN THESE MATTERS. THE REST OF THE GIRLS SIMPLY ARE NOT KEEN ON WHAT IT TAKES TO PROPERLY GOVERN A REALM.

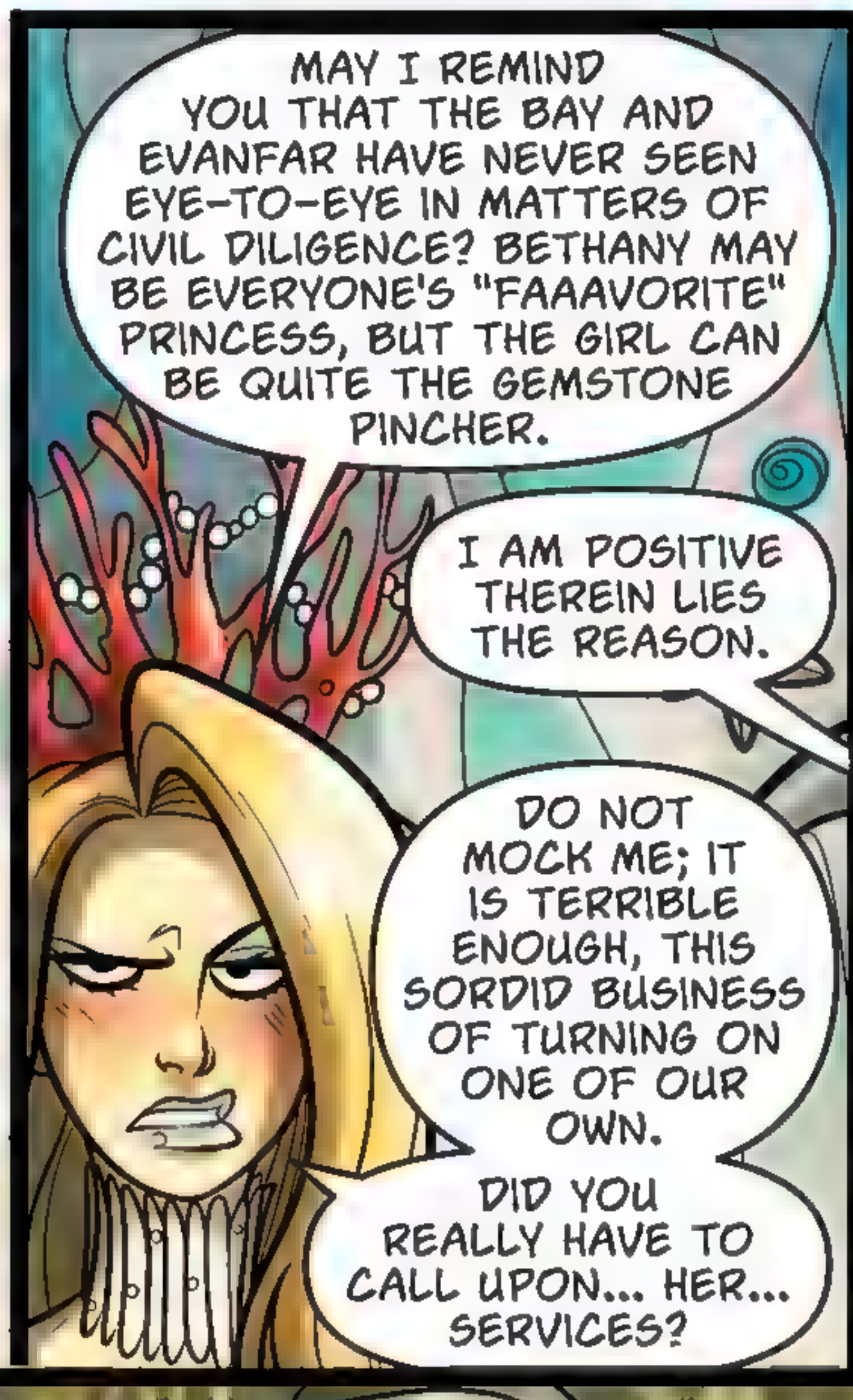
MOST TIMES... IT REQUIRES SACRIFICE.

REALM'S CROSS IS BEYOND REPROACH. ONE MORE BUMP IN THE ROAD AND I MAY LOSE MY MORNING'S TASTE.



YOU DO REALIZE THIS PATH REACHES FROM EVANFAR TO YOUR BAY, IS THIS NOT TRUE, ILINA? THE DUTY FALLS ON YOUR KINGDOMS TO MAINTAIN ITS UPKEEP.

THANK YOU FOR THE JURISDICTIONAL LECTURE, PRINCESS.



MAY I REMIND YOU THAT THE BAY AND EVANFAR HAVE NEVER SEEN EYE-TO-EYE IN MATTERS OF CIVIL DILIGENCE? BETHANY MAY BE EVERYONE'S "FAAAAVORITE" PRINCESS, BUT THE GIRL CAN BE QUITE THE GEMSTONE PINCHER.

I AM POSITIVE THEREIN LIES THE REASON.

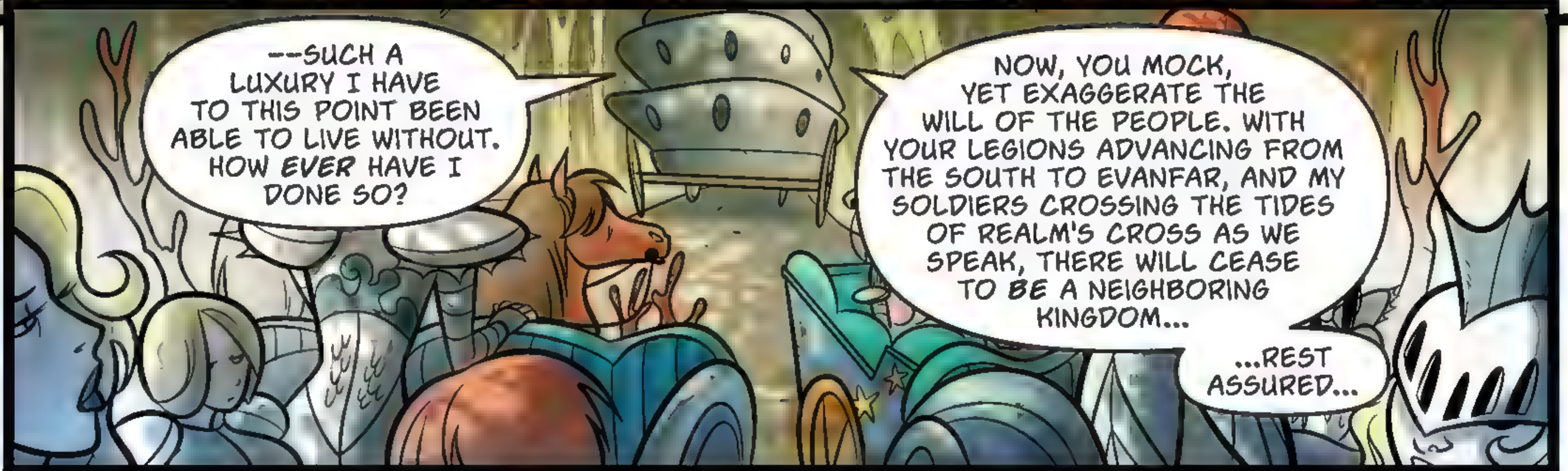
DO NOT MOCK ME; IT IS TERRIBLE ENOUGH, THIS SORDID BUSINESS OF TURNING ON ONE OF OUR OWN.

DID YOU REALLY HAVE TO CALL UPON... HER... SERVICES?



SHE IS THE BEST. I ONLY OUTSOURCE TO THE BEST. YOU SEE BETHANY'S DEATH AS AN UNPLEASANT MATTER, YET, FAIL TO UNDERSTAND THE END RESULT SUCH ACTION WILL AFFORD YOU.

YES, WAR WITH OUR NEIGHBORING KINGDOM. A LIFETIME OF REGRET, AND FORTIFYING MY BORDERS--



--SUCH A LUXURY I HAVE TO THIS POINT BEEN ABLE TO LIVE WITHOUT. HOW EVER HAVE I DONE SO?

NOW, YOU MOCK, YET EXAGGERATE THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE. WITH YOUR LEGIONS ADVANCING FROM THE SOUTH TO EVANFAR, AND MY SOLDIERS CROSSING THE TIDES OF REALM'S CROSS AS WE SPEAK, THERE WILL CEASE TO BE A NEIGHBORING KINGDOM...

...REST ASSURED...

...EVANFAR
WILL BELONG
TO US.

THE MAIDEN SEA.

THANK
YOU, LIRA.
THAT IS A GOOD
GIRL. YOU SAVED
OUR LIVES BACK
THERE.

I HAVE NOT SEEN HER
SINCE SHE WAS A BABY. SHE IS
SO LARGE, NOW. AND THANK YOU FOR
NOT HARMING MY SOLDIERS BACK THERE--
THEY WERE ONLY SERVING THEIR
DUTIES.

BETHANY--YOU MUST NOT
BE NAÏVE. LETTING THOSE SOLDIERS
LIVE MEANS MORE MOUTHS THAT MAY
REVEAL OUR WHEREABOUTS.

I KNOW...
BUT...THEY
ARE MY
PEOPLE.

I HAVE
NEVER BEEN OUT
TO SEA BEFORE--
LET ALONE RIDING
A MONSTER.

THEY ARE NOT
MONSTERS. WHAT YOU
SAW BACK THERE WAS HER
PROTECTIVE INSTINCTS. BUT,
LIRA COULD JUST HAVE EASILY
KILLED YOUR SOLDIERS IF SHE
PLEASED. LISTEN TO ME,
BOTH OF YOU--

YOU MUST
UNDERSTAND, YOU HAVE
NO PEOPLE ANYMORE. THE
CITIZENS WILL FOLLOW THE
DYING MEN'S DECLARATION, DO
NOT FOOL YOURSELVES INTO
BELIEVING YOU ARE
SAFE.

KIM...
WHAT DO YOU
PROPOSE WE
DO NOW?

LIRA CAN
BRING US TO
THE SHORES OF
THE MAIDEN ISLANDS.
IN MY KINGDOM
WE WILL BE
SAFE...

...YET, YOU
BOTH ARE NOT
THE ONLY ONES
WITH A TARGET ON
YOUR BACKS,
NOW.

THE SHADOW MOUNTAINS.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I ASK OF YOU, HORSE?

ARNEN IS AT YOUR COMMAND, MY LORD. HOWEVER, ARNEN IS A UNICORN NOT A HORSE.

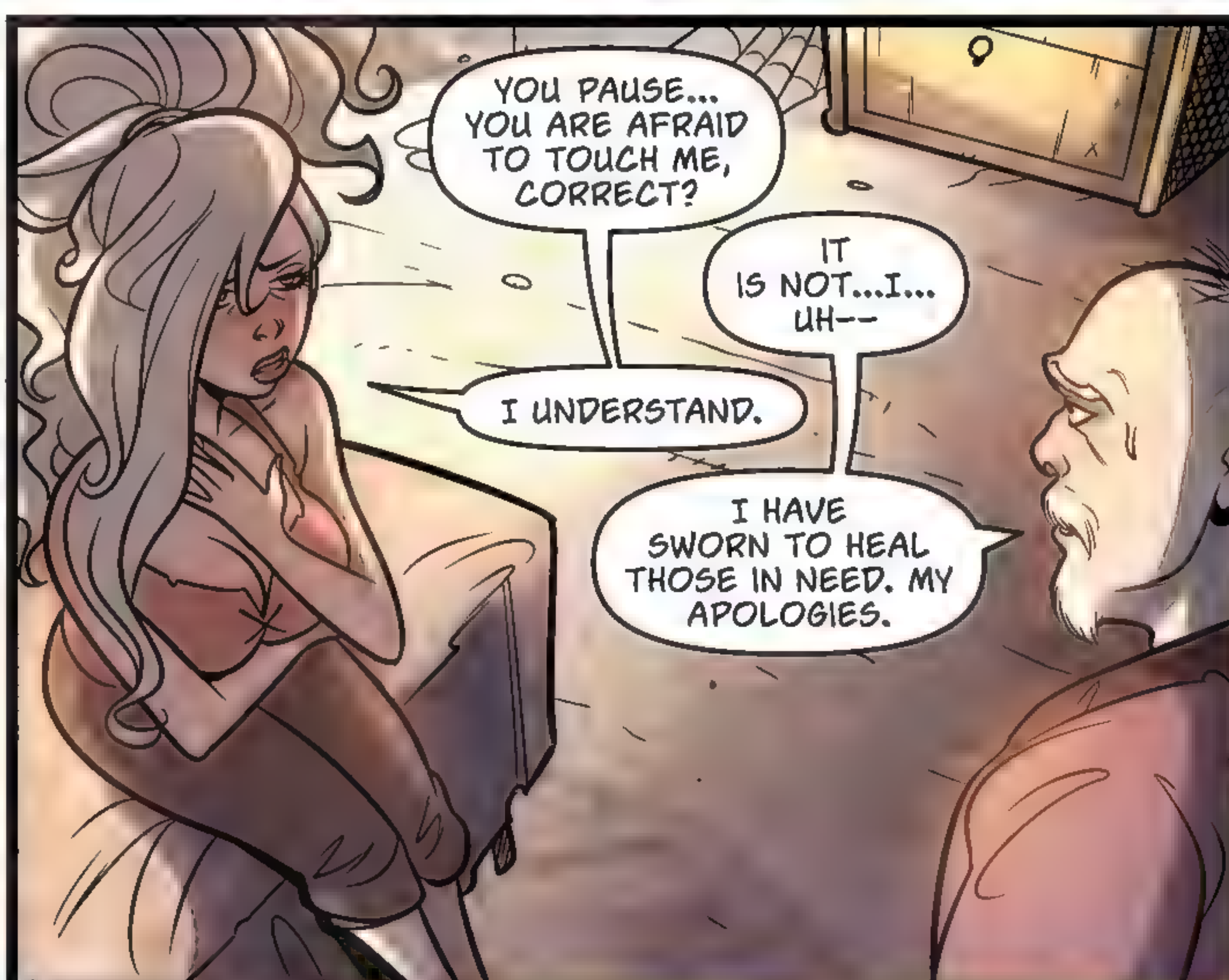
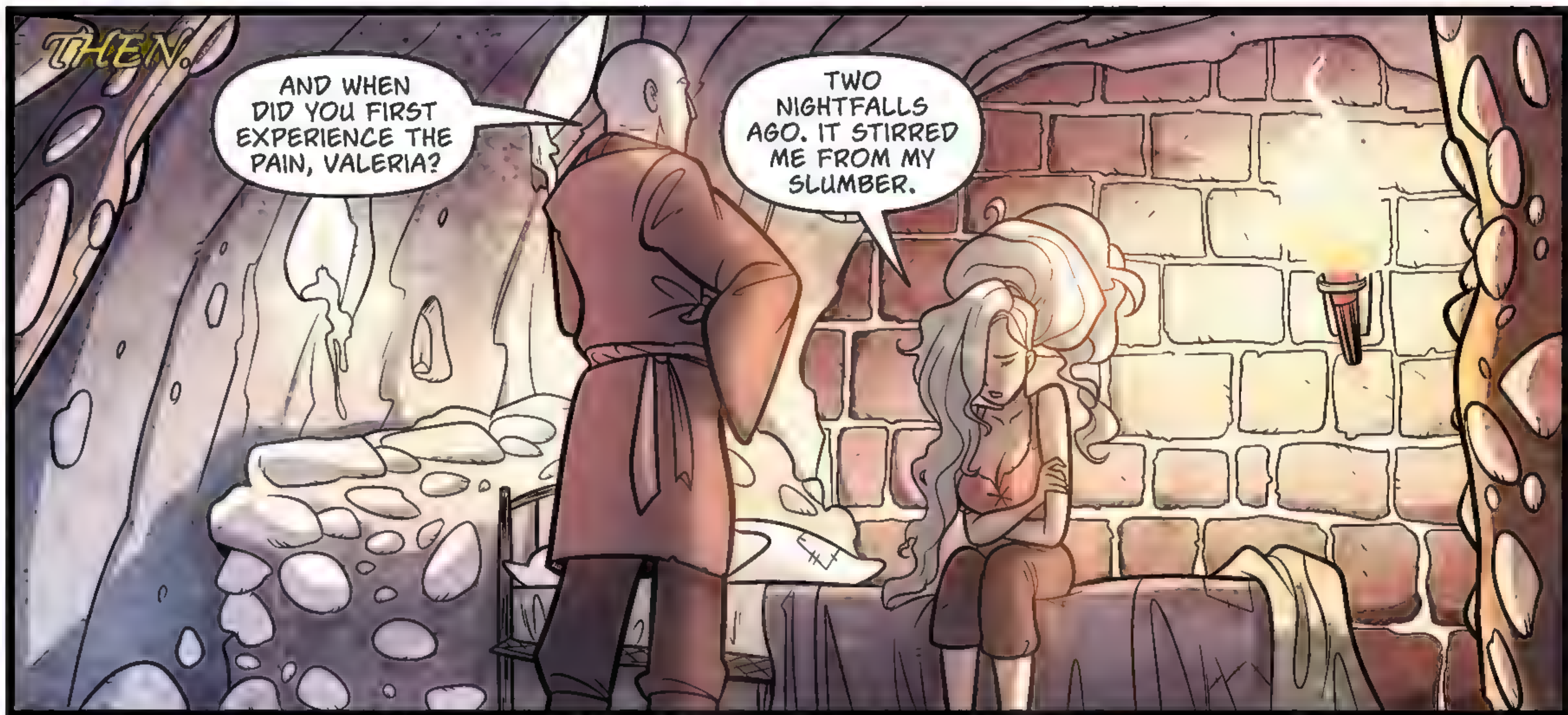
EVEN WITH SPELLS AS POTENT AS MINE, YOUR MADDENING DIALECT CONTINUES... A PITY. I SHALL WORK ON THAT.

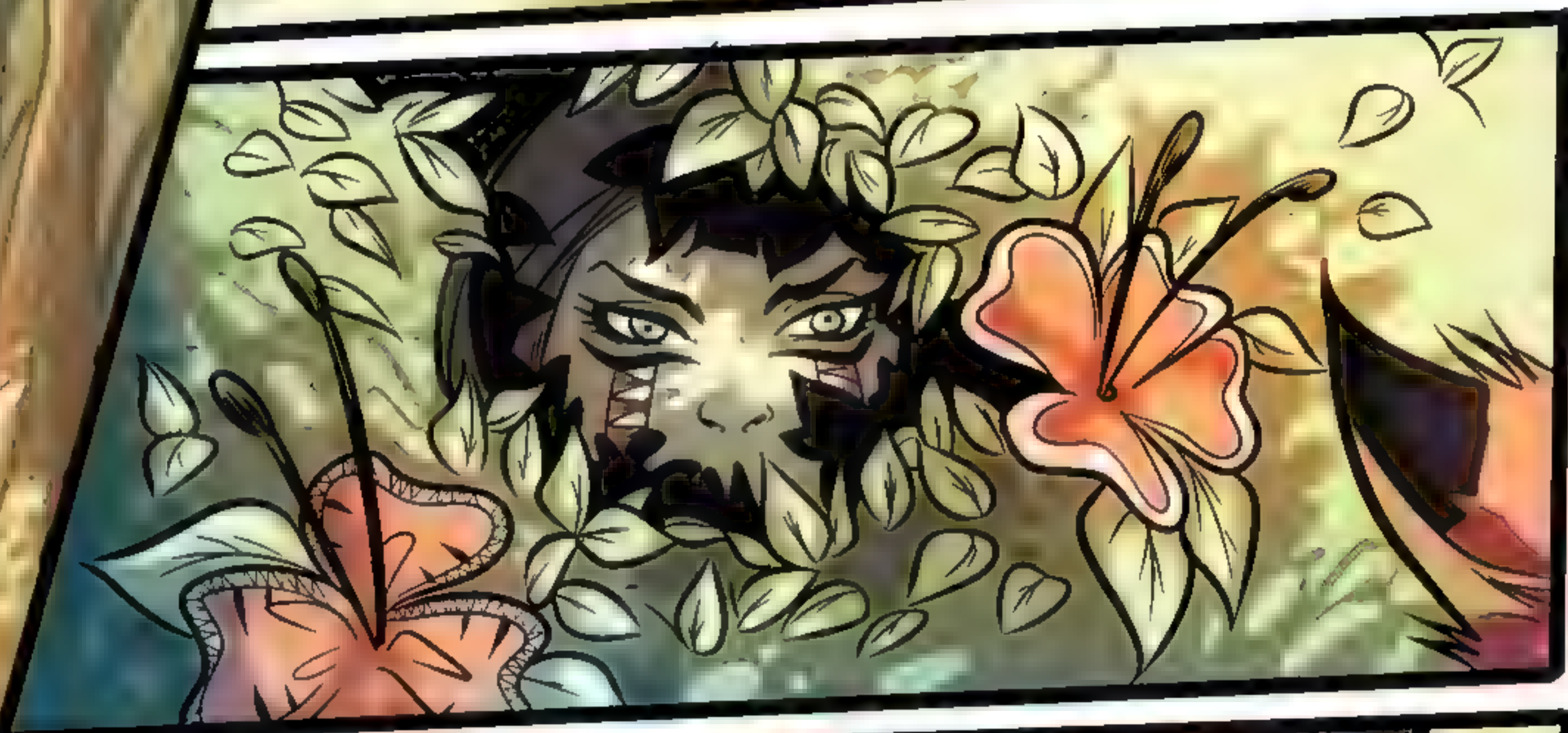
YOU WILL BE A GOOD BOY AND BRING ME MY PRIZE, WILL YOU NOT?

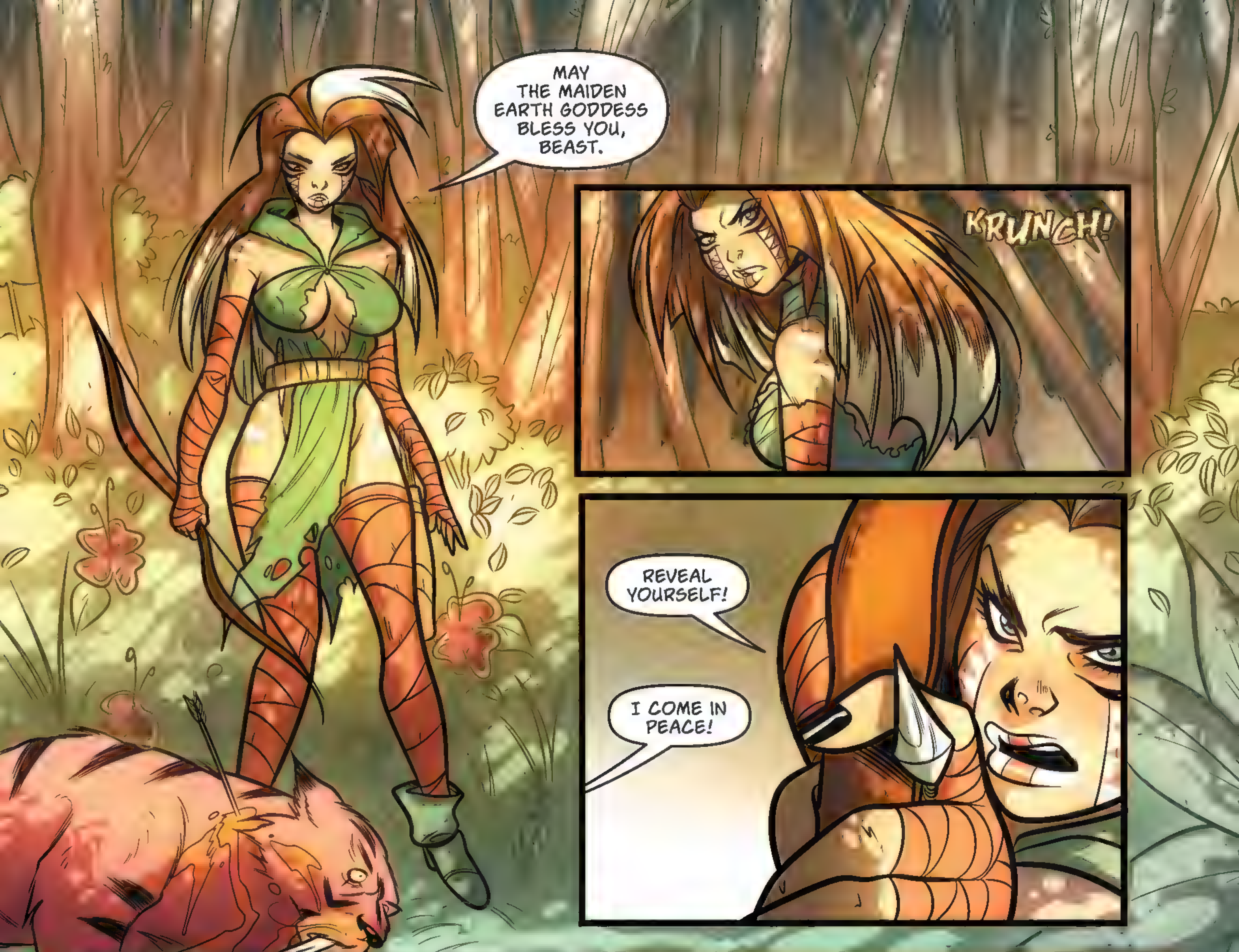
AS YOU COMMAND.

GOOD. NOW...

...BRING ME MY DAUGHTER.







MAY
THE MAIDEN
EARTH GODDESS
BLESS YOU,
BEAST.

KRUNCH!

REVEAL
YOURSELF!

I COME IN
PEACE!

I AM YALARA,
LIEUTENANT IN SERVICE
OF THE GREAT KEEP. I HAVE
TRAVELED MANY MOONS TO
FIND YOU, DEVONESS.

MY WHEREABOUTS
ARE PURPOSELY KEPT
VEILED, HORSEWOMAN.
YOU WILL HAVE TO DO
BETTER THAN THAT.

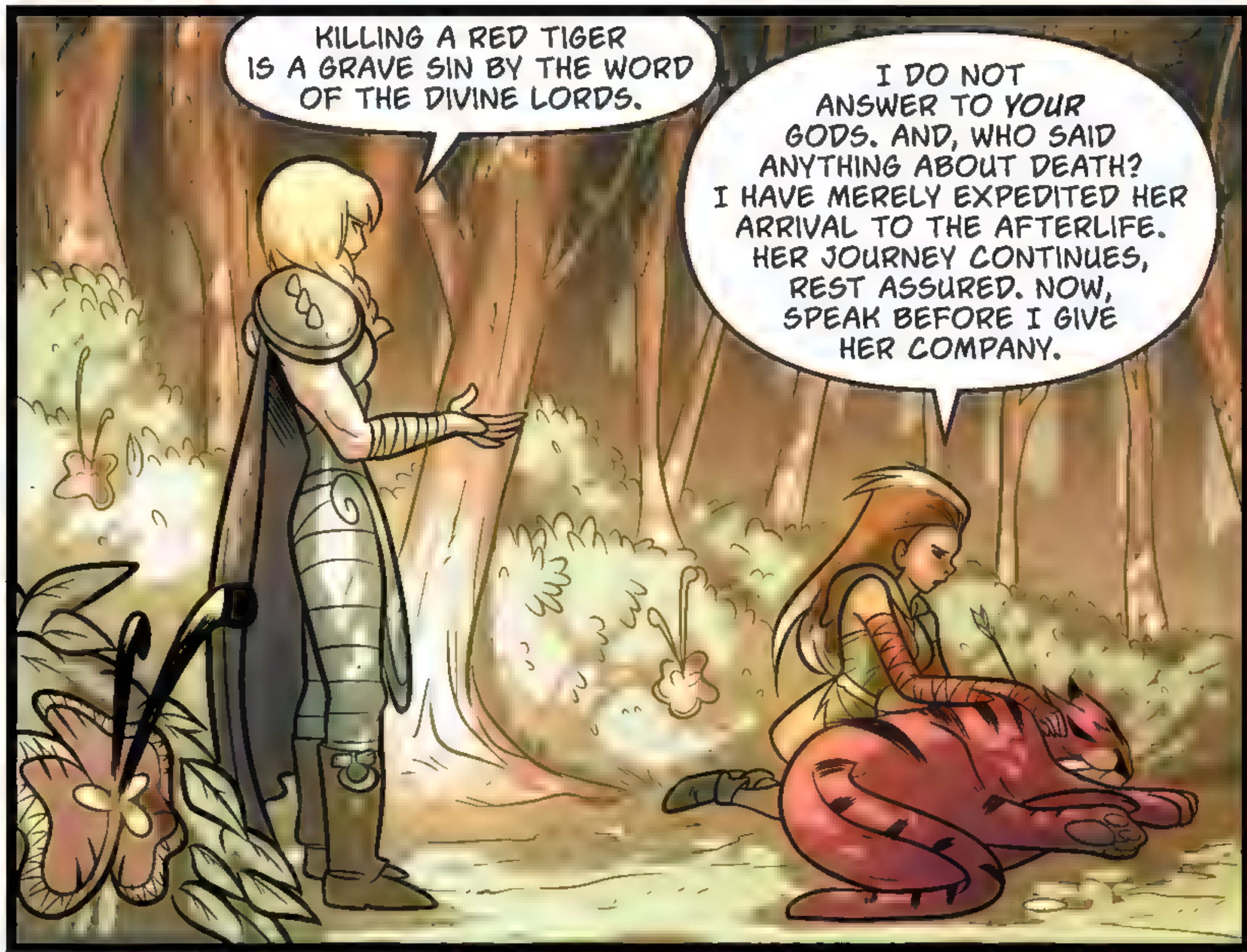
YES, INDEED,
BUT THIS FOREST
IS STILL WITHIN OUR
REALM. NOTHING ESCAPES
OUR KNOWLEDGE--EVEN
ONE AS CUNNING AS
YOURSELF, MY LADY.

I AM NO
LADY, NOR
A CITIZEN OF
THE KEEP.

TRUE...
THIS IS WHY I
HAVE SOUGHT
YOU OUT.

I AM
LISTENING.

I SHOULD HAVE NEVER
LISTENED TO HER. THAT WAS
MY FIRST MISTAKE. SO, YES--
I AM AN ASSASSIN BY TRADE.
NOT A BIG DEAL, IF YOU
ASK ME.



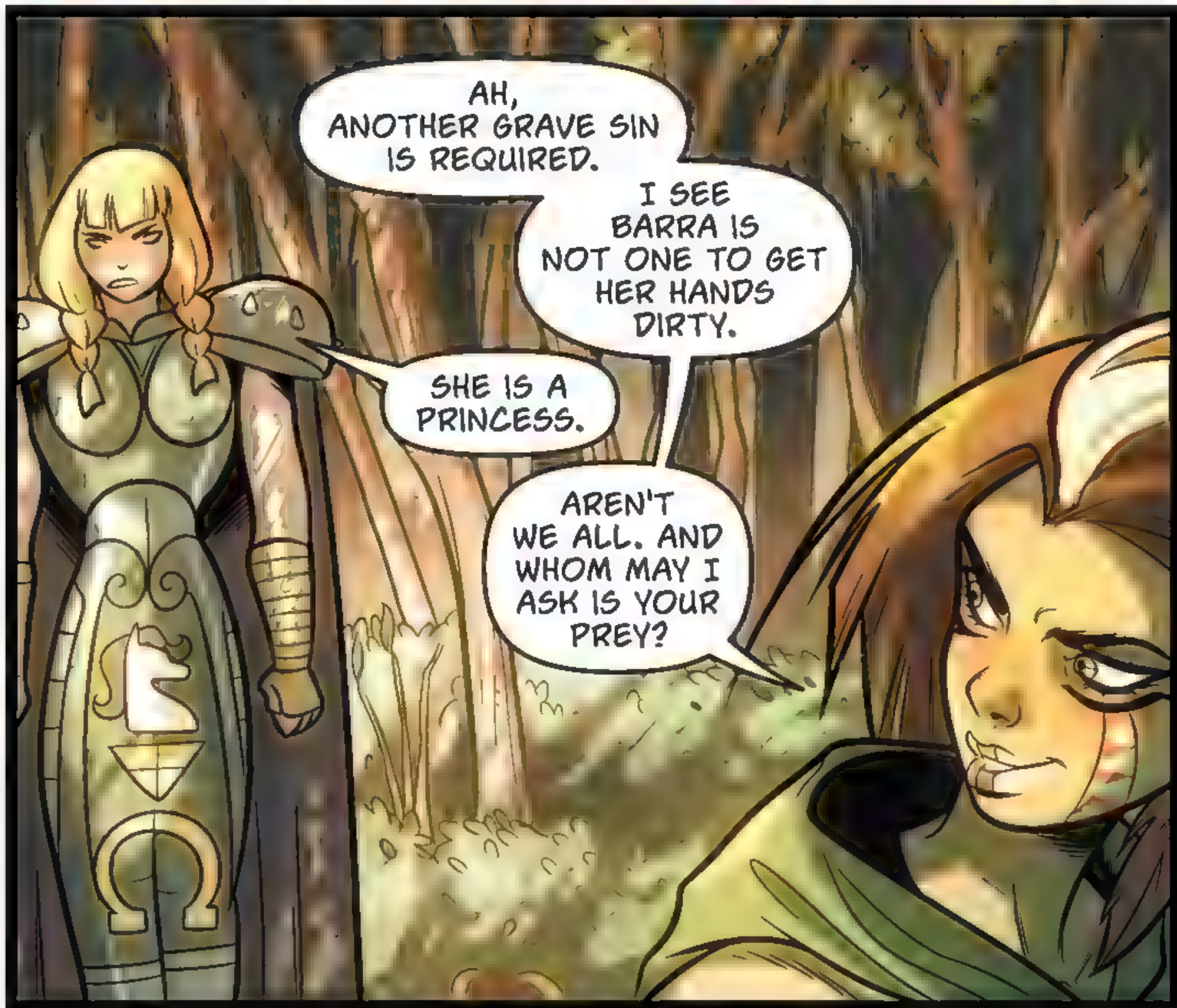
KILLING A RED TIGER IS A GRAVE SIN BY THE WORD OF THE DIVINE LORDS.

I DO NOT ANSWER TO YOUR GODS. AND, WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT DEATH? I HAVE MERELY EXPEDITED HER ARRIVAL TO THE AFTERLIFE. HER JOURNEY CONTINUES, REST ASSURED. NOW, SPEAK BEFORE I GIVE HER COMPANY.



YES...WELL, THE GREAT AND HONORABLE PRINCESS BARRA HAS REQUESTED YOUR SERVICE IN THE MATTER OF... WELL, YOU KNOW... THE LEGEND OF DEVONESS THE ASSASSIN IS RENOWNED ACROSS THE FIVE.

YOU ARE THE BEST HUNTSMAN IN ALL THE LAND.

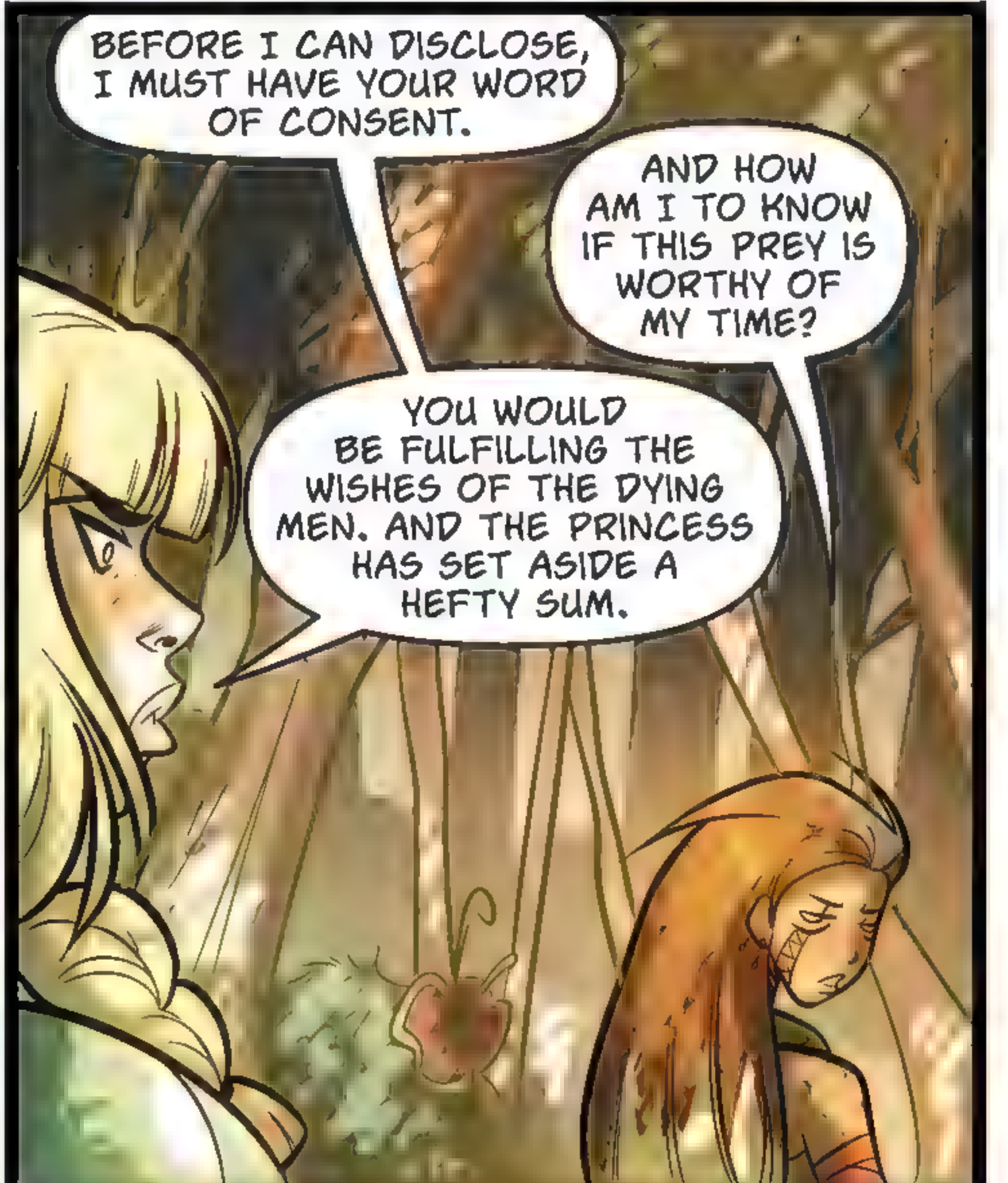


AH, ANOTHER GRAVE SIN IS REQUIRED.

I SEE BARRA IS NOT ONE TO GET HER HANDS DIRTY.

SHE IS A PRINCESS.

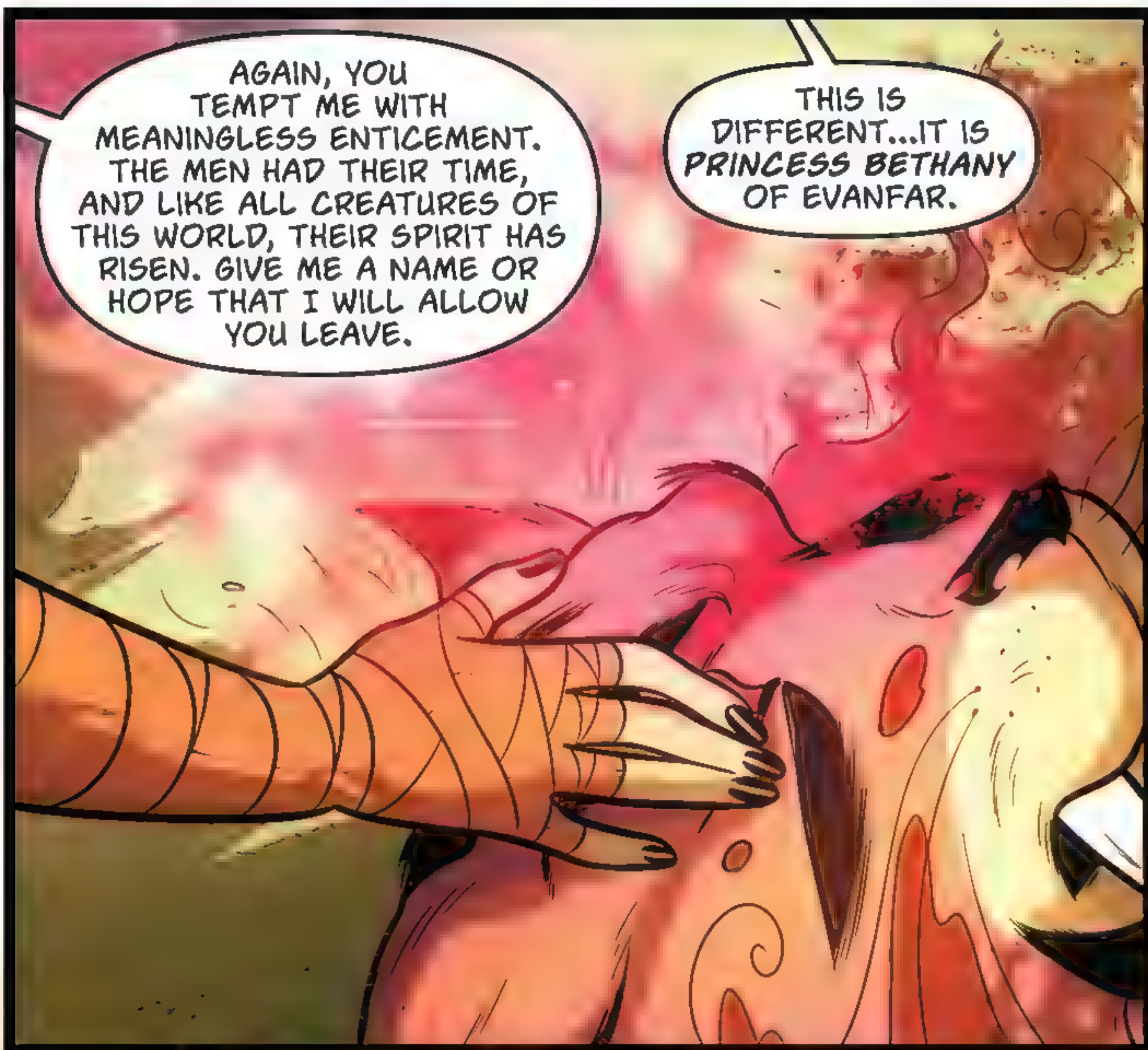
AREN'T WE ALL. AND WHOM MAY I ASK IS YOUR PREY?



BEFORE I CAN DISCLOSE, I MUST HAVE YOUR WORD OF CONSENT.

AND HOW AM I TO KNOW IF THIS PREY IS WORTHY OF MY TIME?

YOU WOULD BE FULFILLING THE WISHES OF THE DYING MEN. AND THE PRINCESS HAS SET ASIDE A HEFTY SUM.

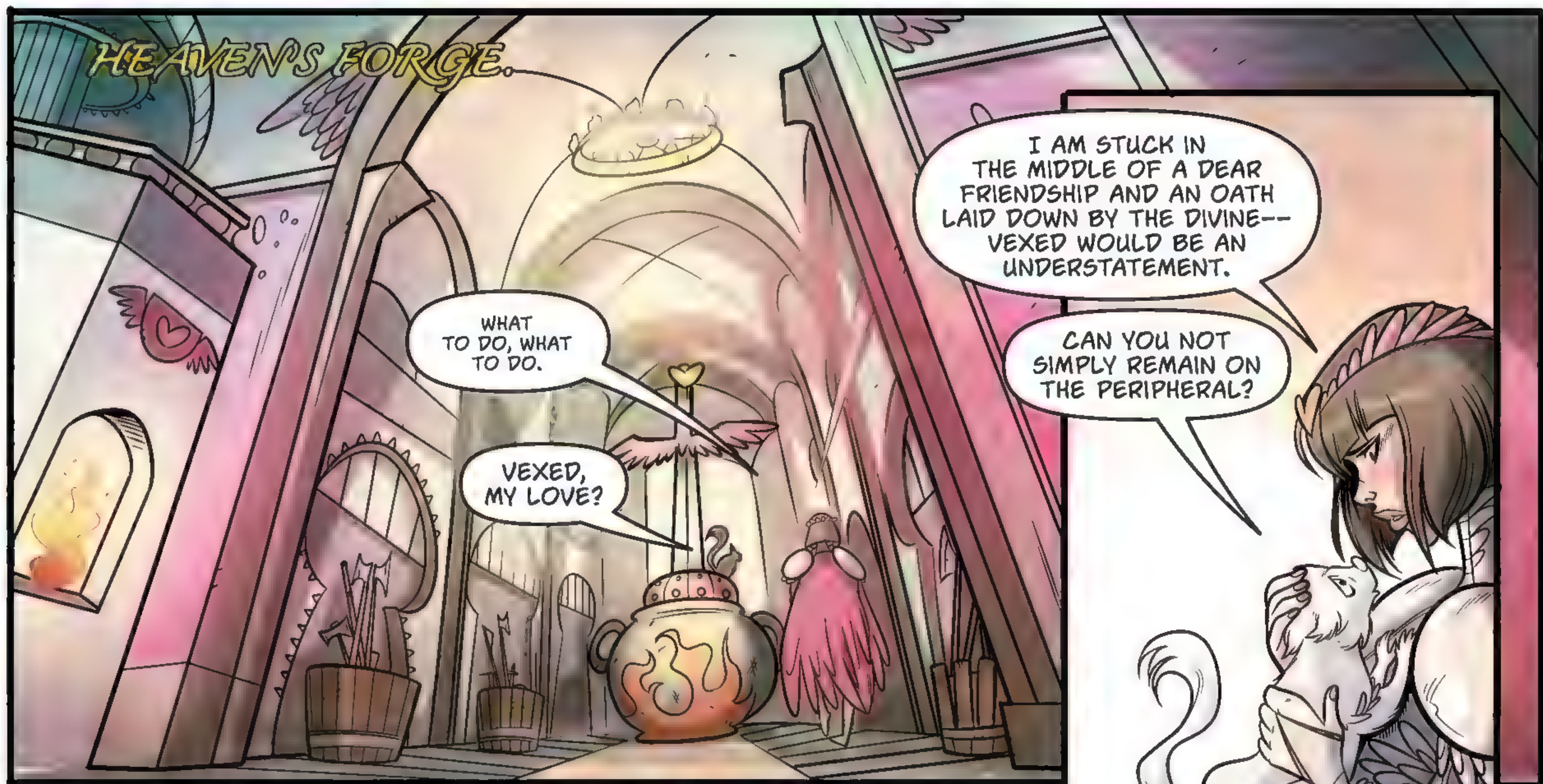


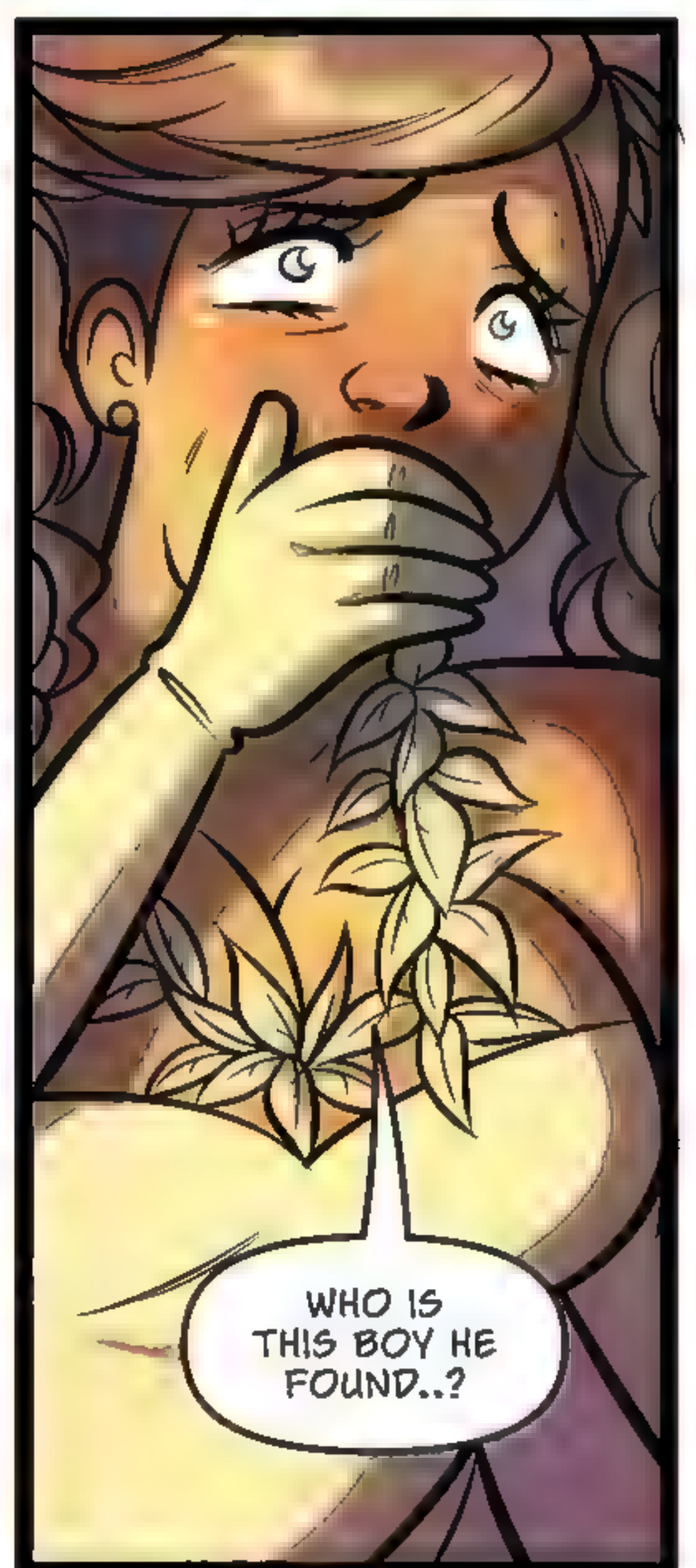
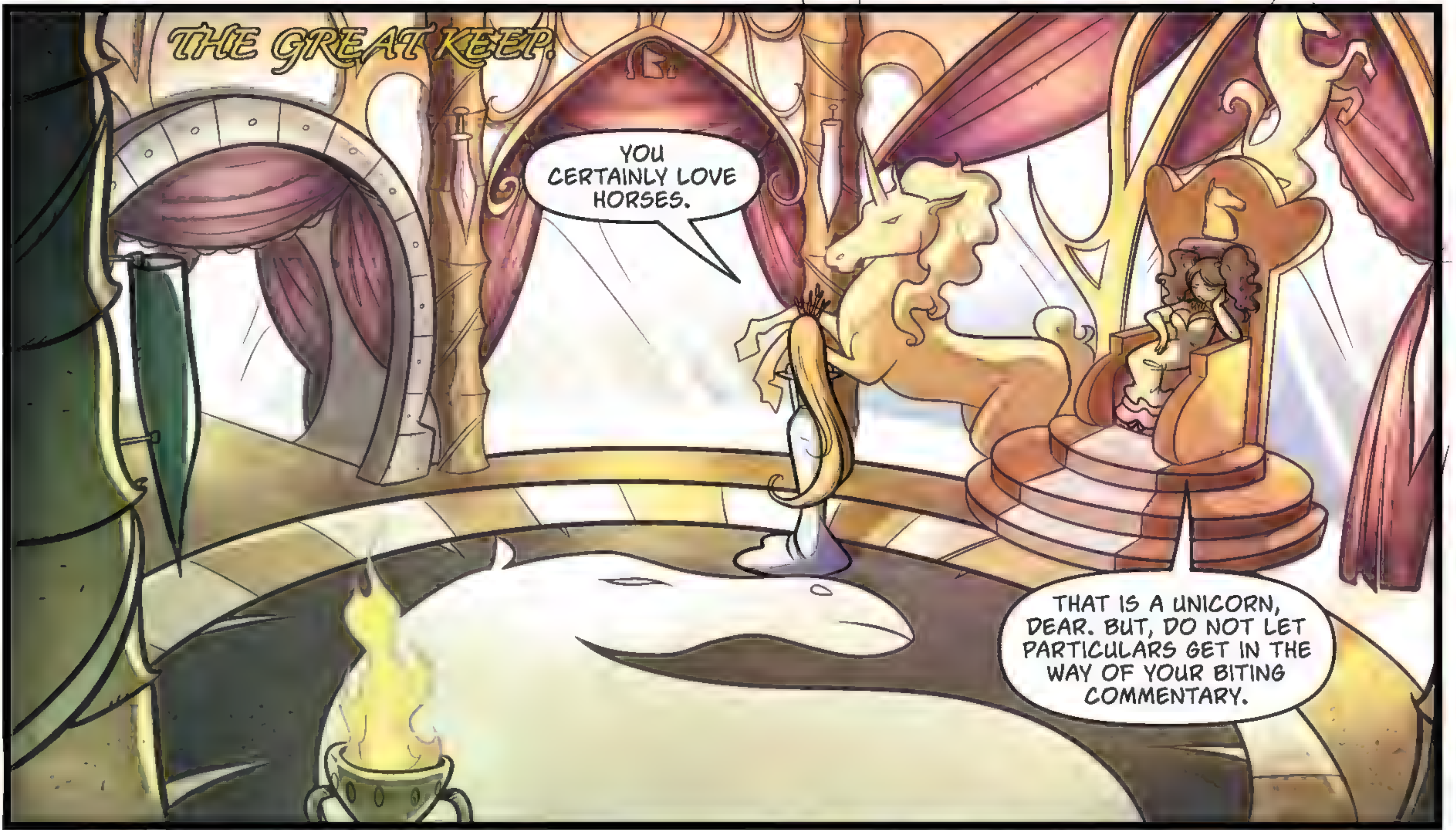
AGAIN, YOU TEMPT ME WITH MEANINGLESS ENTICEMENT. THE MEN HAD THEIR TIME, AND LIKE ALL CREATURES OF THIS WORLD, THEIR SPIRIT HAS RISEN. GIVE ME A NAME OR HOPE THAT I WILL ALLOW YOU LEAVE.

THIS IS DIFFERENT...IT IS PRINCESS BETHANY OF EVANFAR.



DID YOU SAY... BETHANY?!







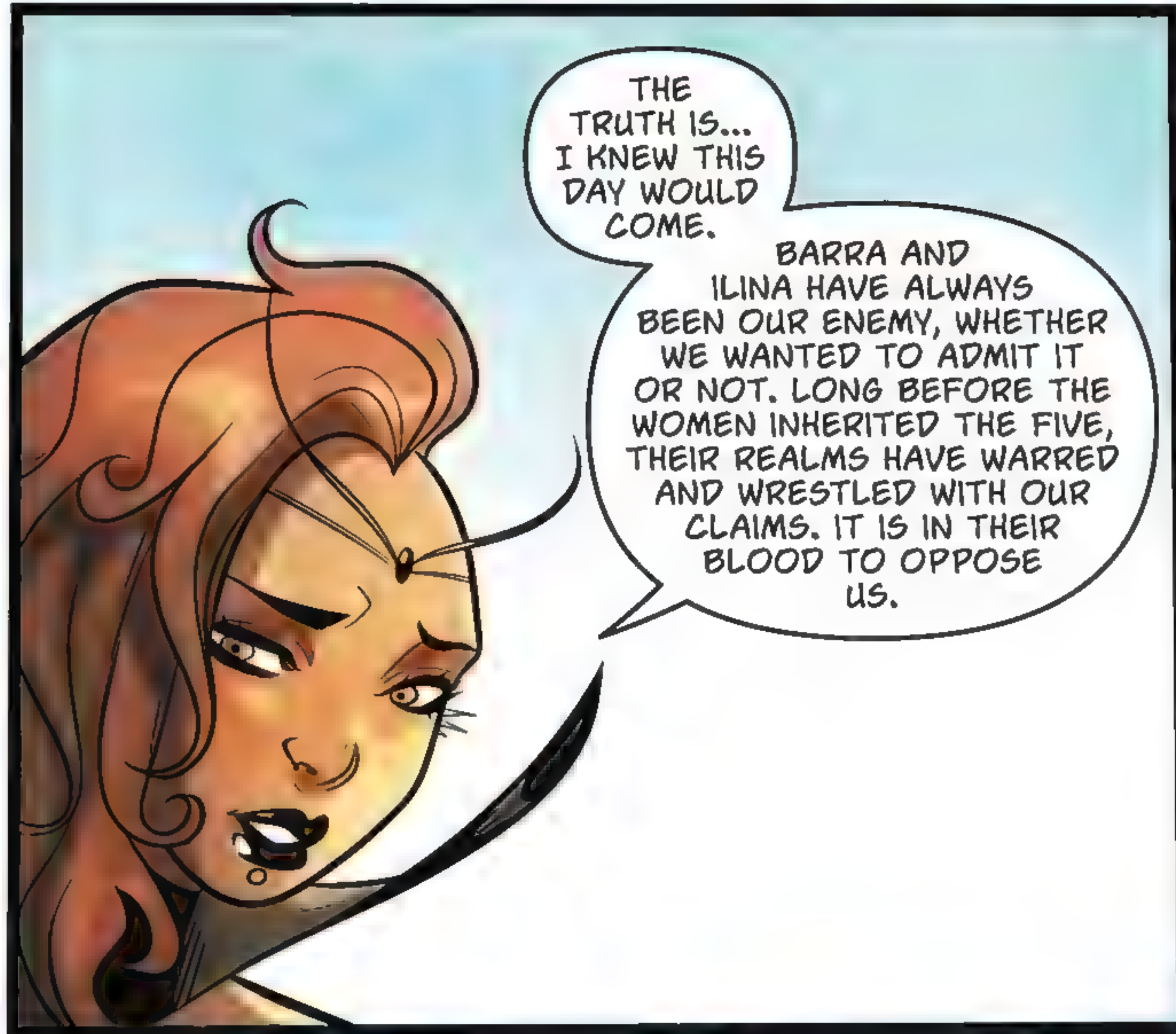
HEEEERE, LITTLE ONES. MAKE SURE TO SHARE, THERE IS PLENTY FOR EVERYONE.



YOU MUST HATE ME.

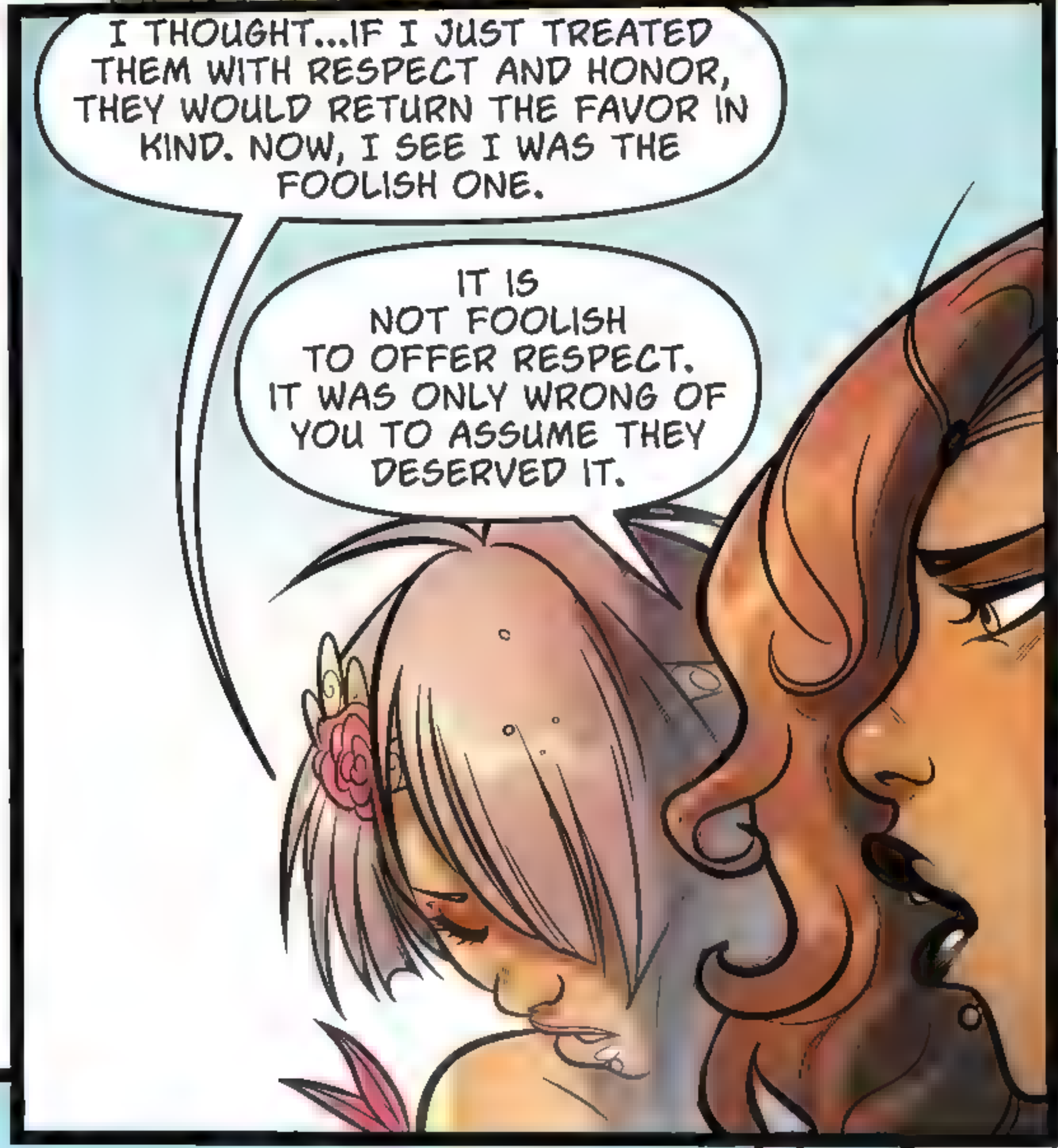
NOT ONLY HAVE YOU PUT YOUR KINGDOM AND YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE FOR ME--- BUT NOW YOU HAVE TO BABYSIT US AS WELL.

I COULD NEVER HATE YOU, BETHANY.



THE TRUTH IS... I KNEW THIS DAY WOULD COME.

BARRA AND ILINA HAVE ALWAYS BEEN OUR ENEMY, WHETHER WE WANTED TO ADMIT IT OR NOT. LONG BEFORE THE WOMEN INHERITED THE FIVE, THEIR REALMS HAVE WARRED AND WRESTLED WITH OUR CLAIMS. IT IS IN THEIR BLOOD TO OPPOSE US.



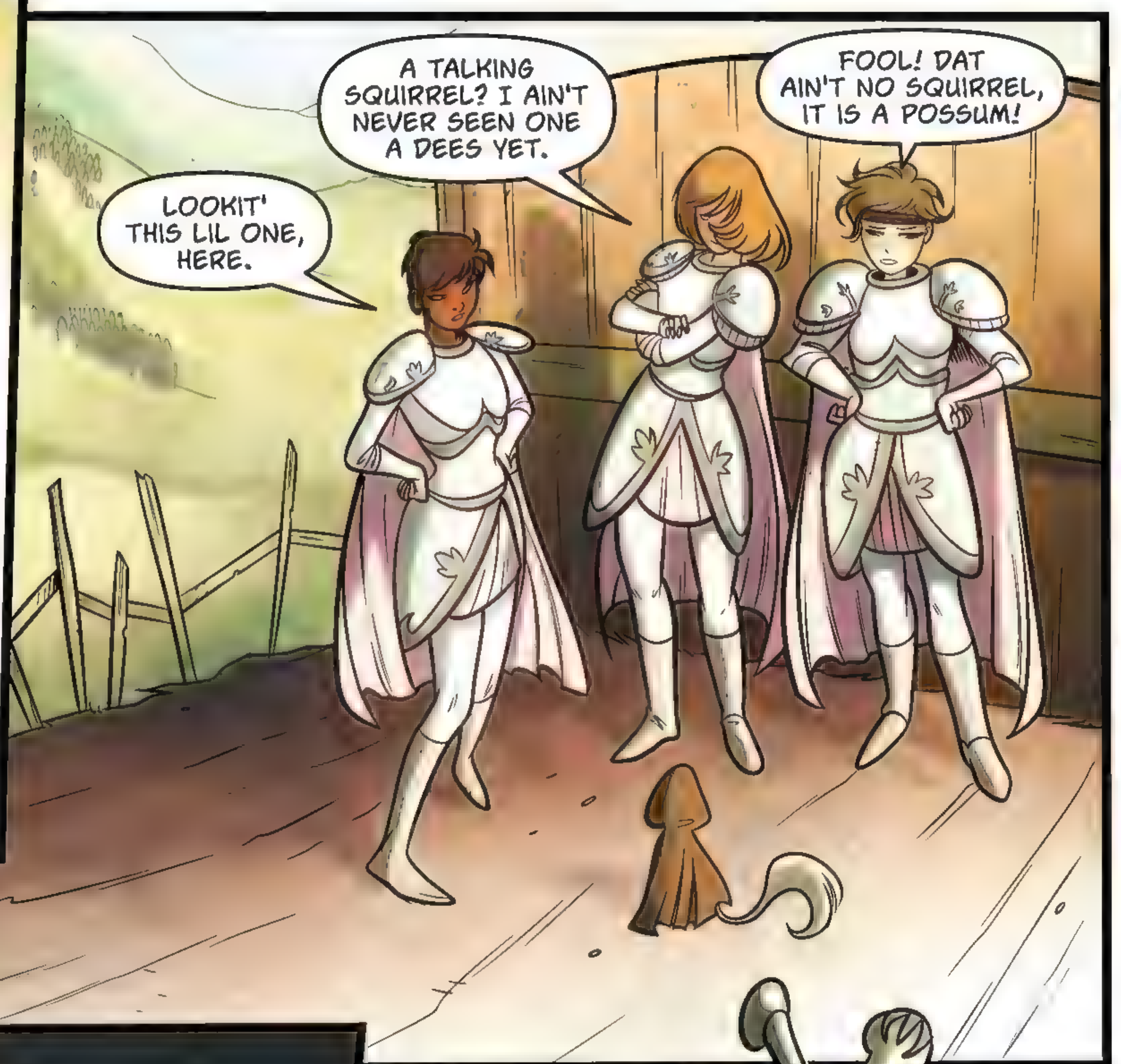
I THOUGHT...IF I JUST TREATED THEM WITH RESPECT AND HONOR, THEY WOULD RETURN THE FAVOR IN KIND. NOW, I SEE I WAS THE FOOLISH ONE.

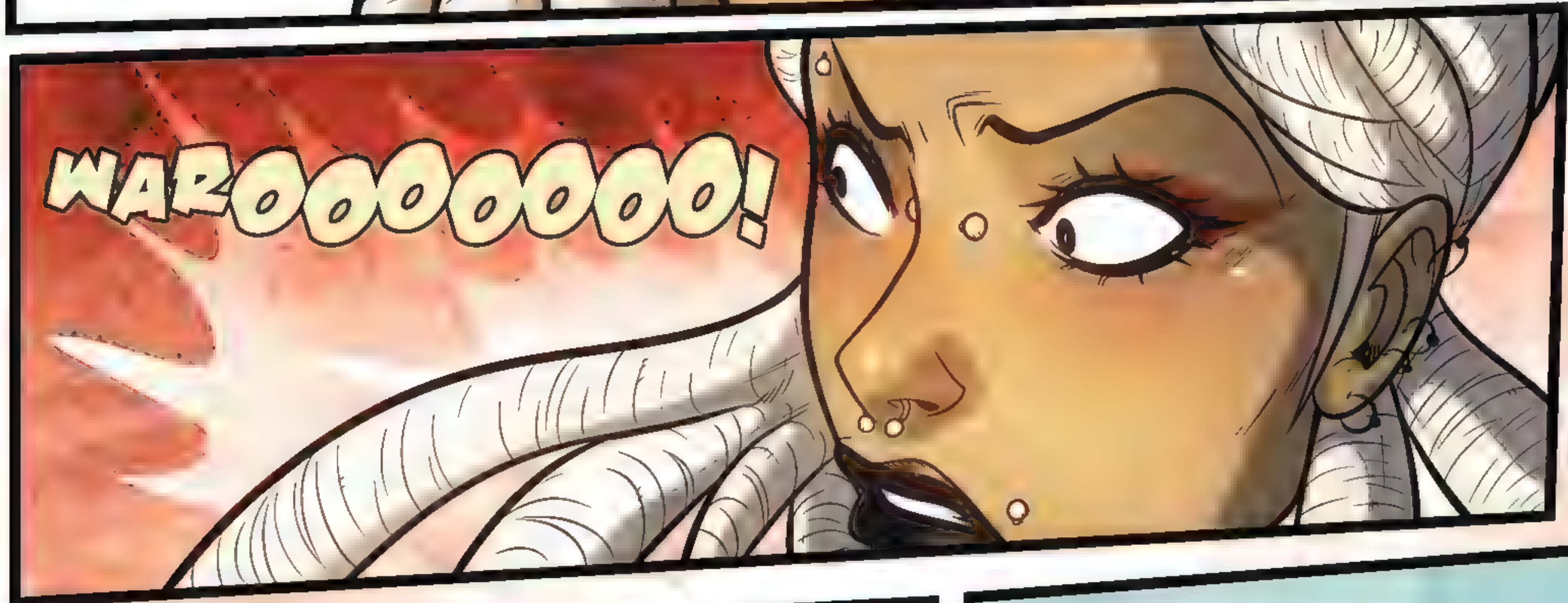
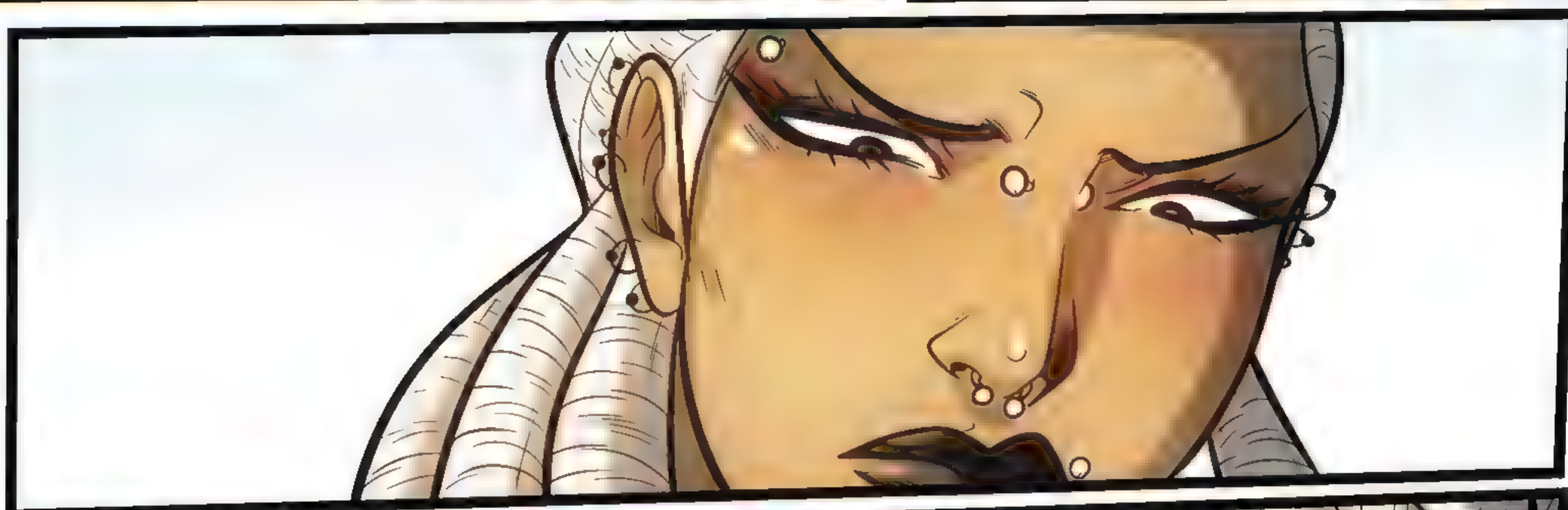
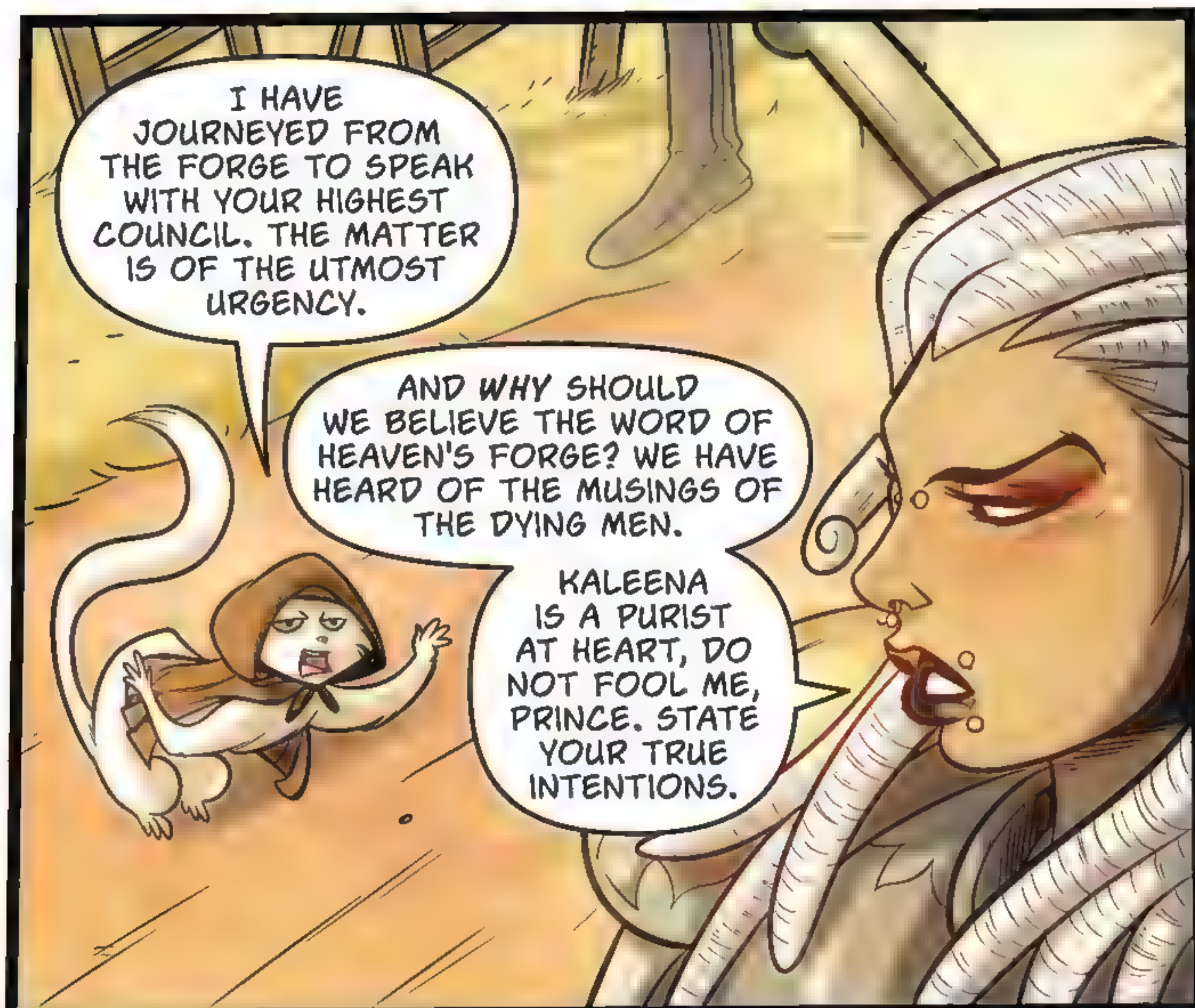
IT IS NOT FOOLISH TO OFFER RESPECT. IT WAS ONLY WRONG OF YOU TO ASSUME THEY DESERVED IT.



THOSE TWO HAVE ALWAYS CRAVED POWER OVER RESPECT.

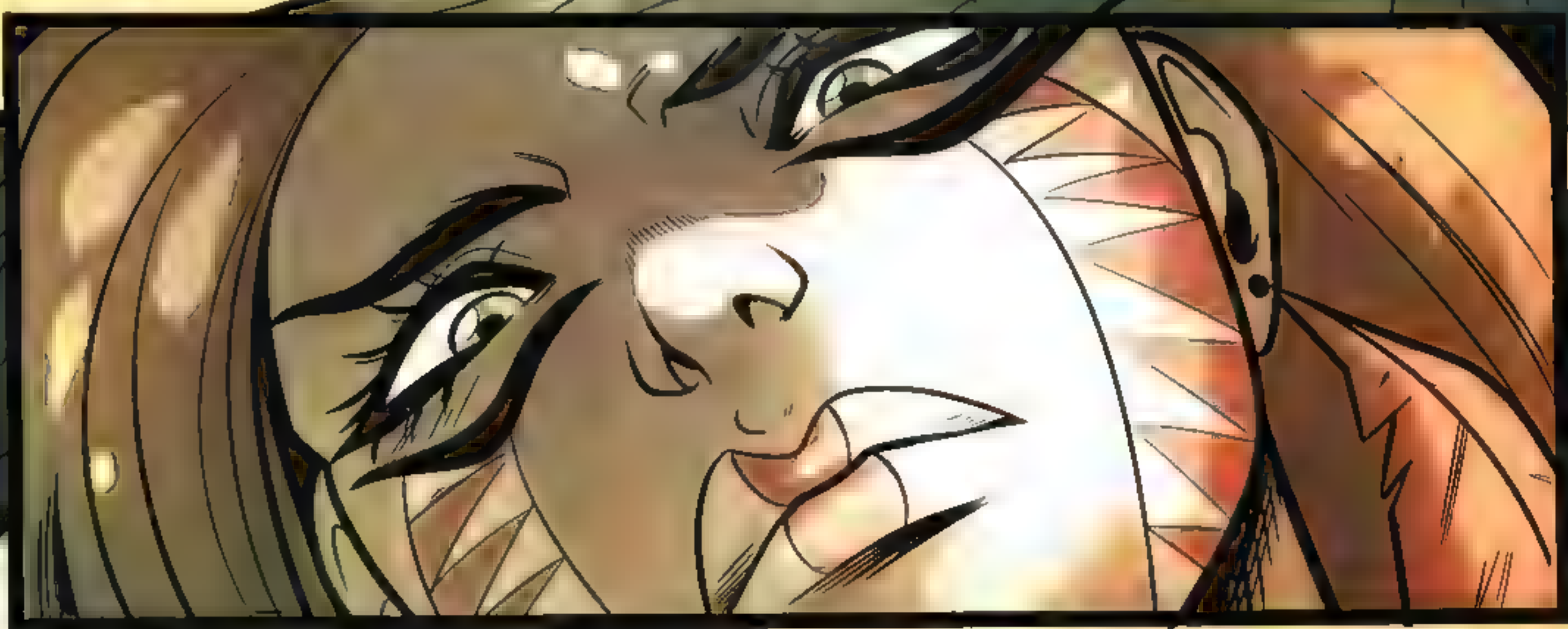
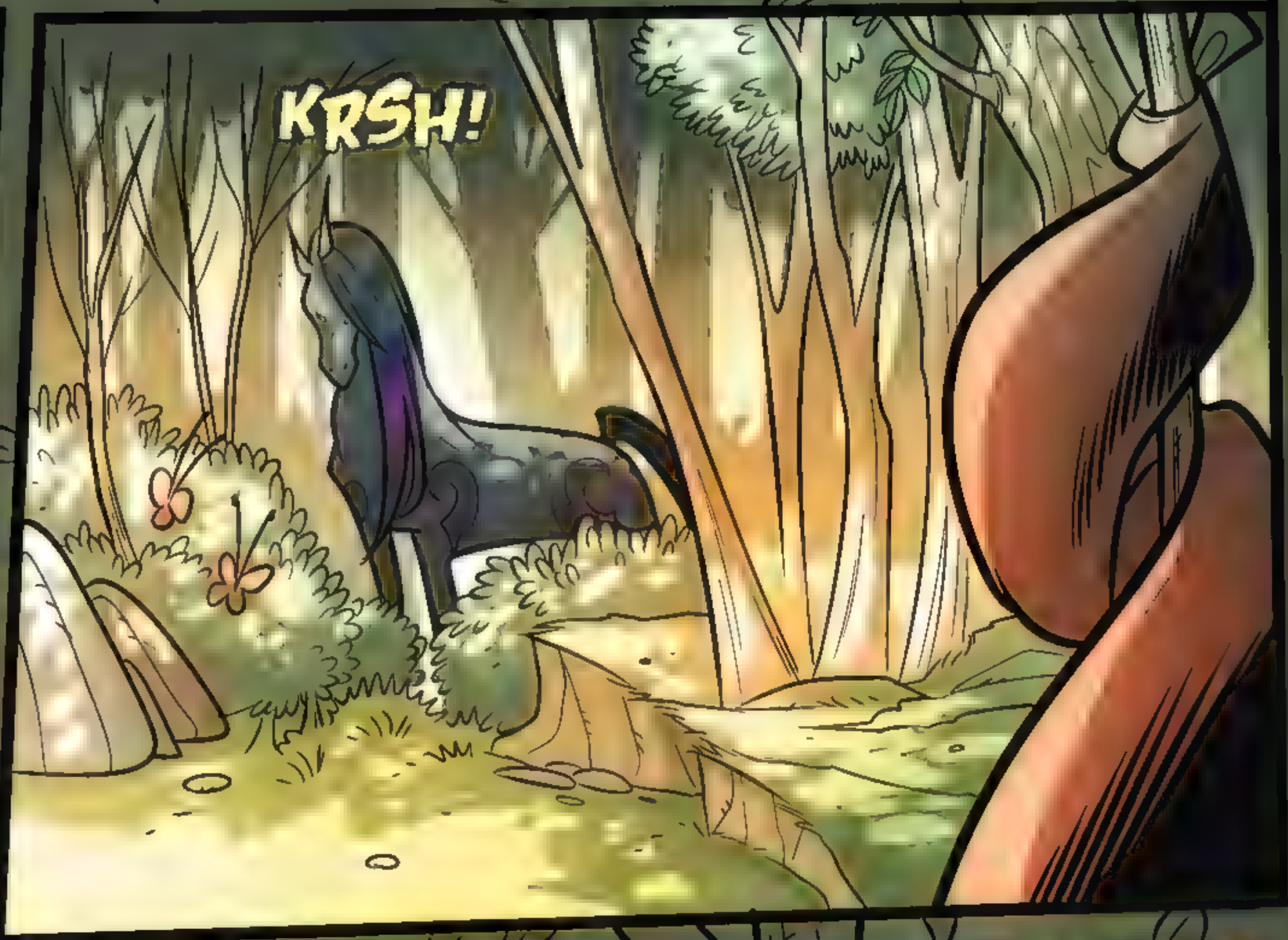
THE FOLD.
TWELVE MOONS
LATER.







...DOOMED
US ALL.





WHO ARE YOU?!

REEEE!!!!!!!!!!!!

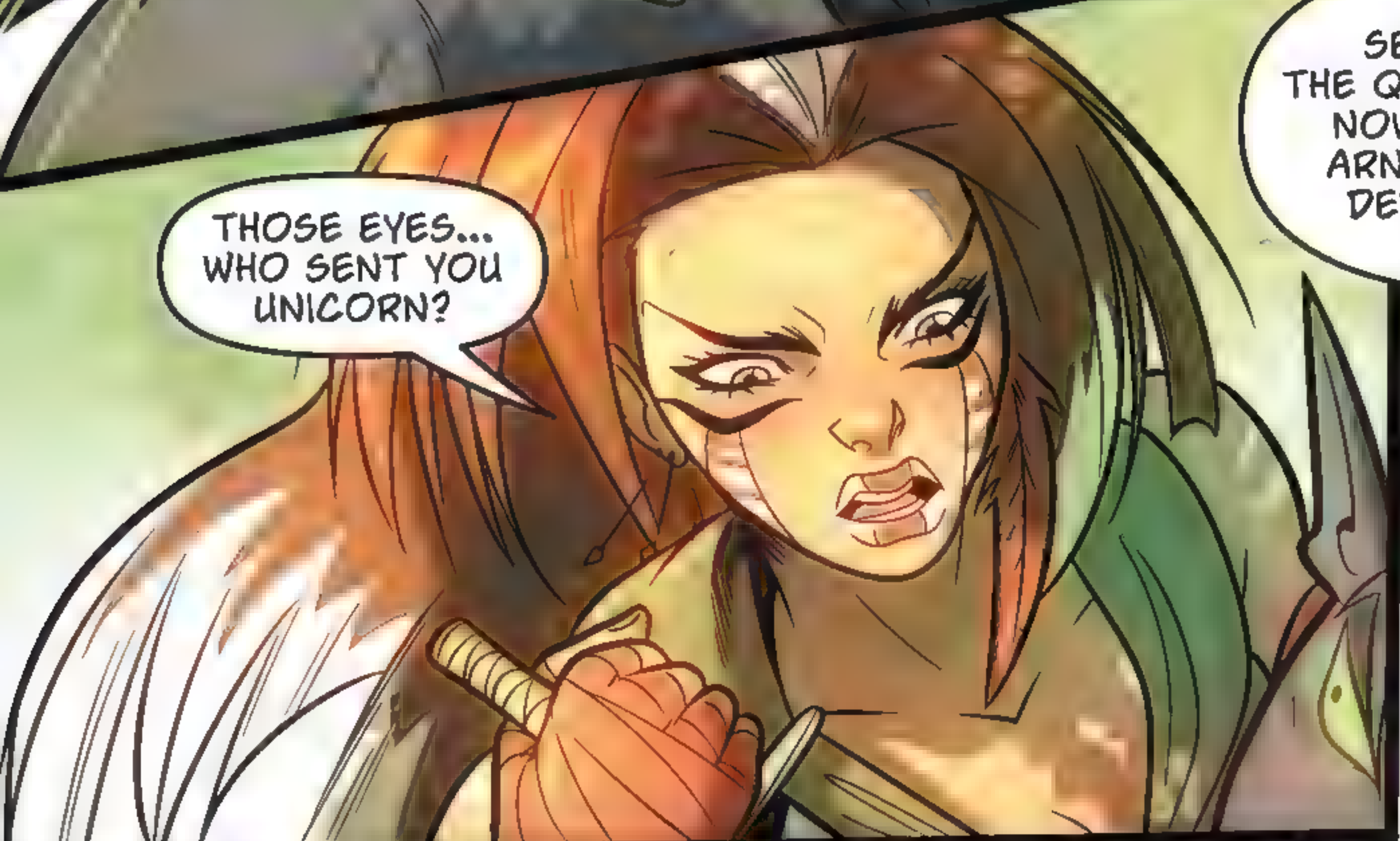


ANSWER ME NOW OR THE NEXT SOUND YOU HEAR WILL BE MY DAGGER AS IT PIERCES YOUR SKULL!

ARNEN DOES NOT WISH TO HARM YOU!!

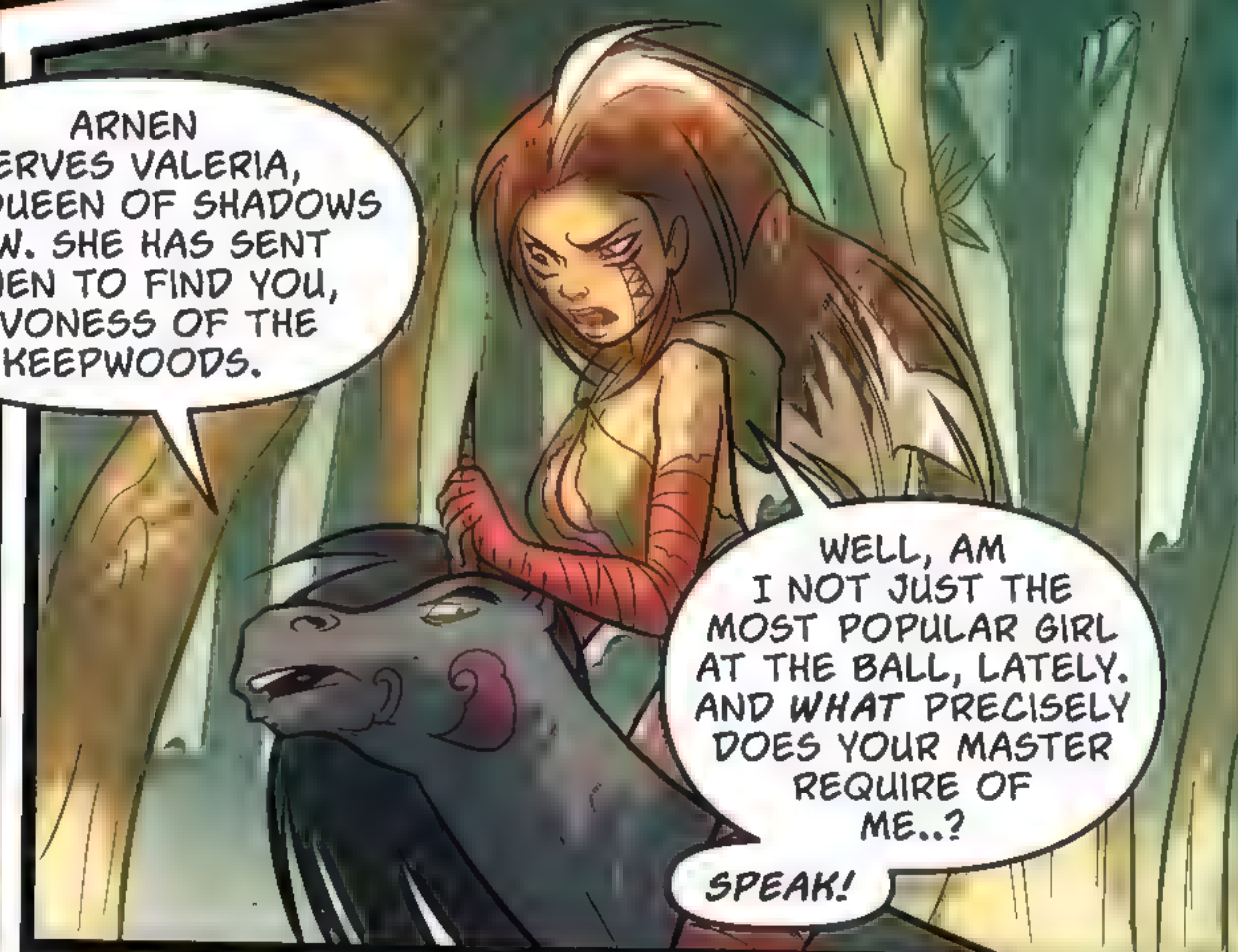
WHO IS ARNEN?

YOU ARE RIDING ARNEN!



THOSE EYES... WHO SENT YOU UNICORN?

ARNEN SERVES VALERIA, THE QUEEN OF SHADOWS NOW. SHE HAS SENT ARNEN TO FIND YOU, DEVONESS OF THE KEEPWOODS.



WELL, AM I NOT JUST THE MOST POPULAR GIRL AT THE BALL, LATELY. AND WHAT PRECISELY DOES YOUR MASTER REQUIRE OF ME..?

SPEAK!



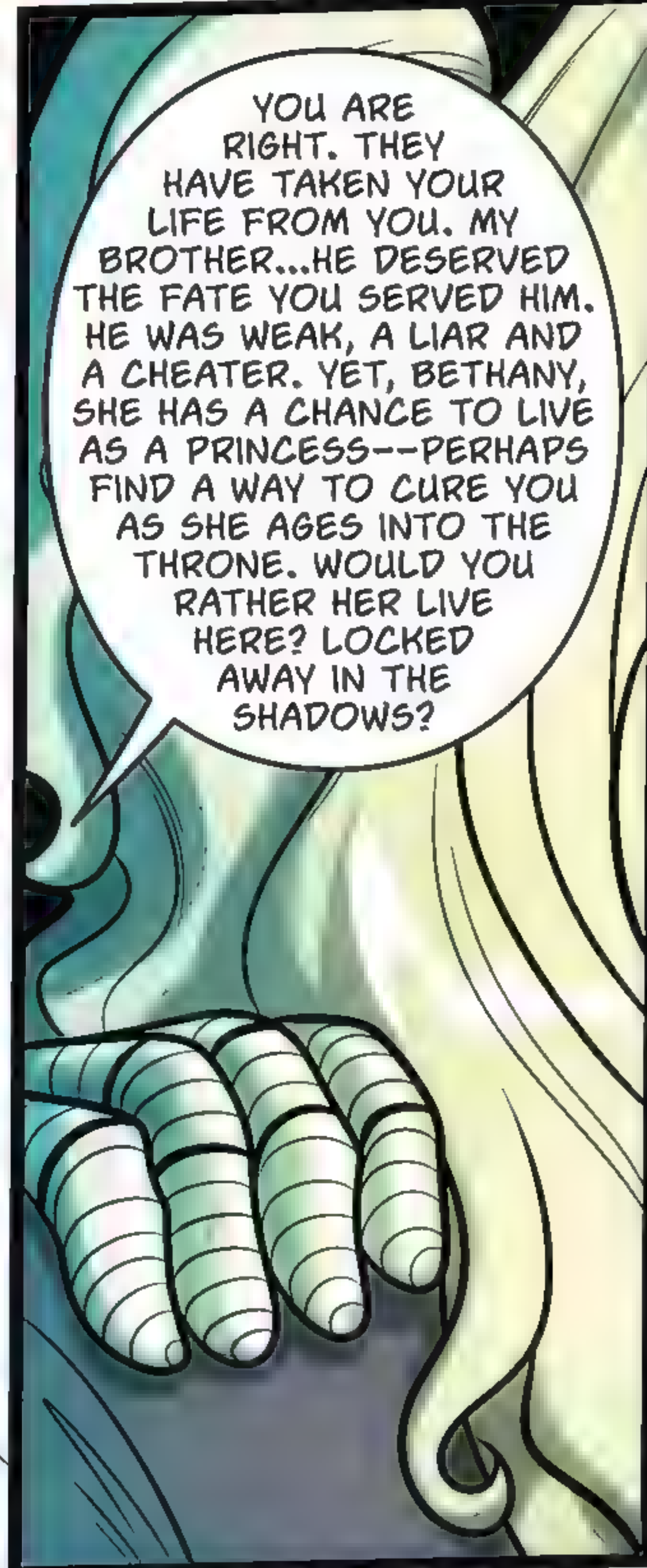
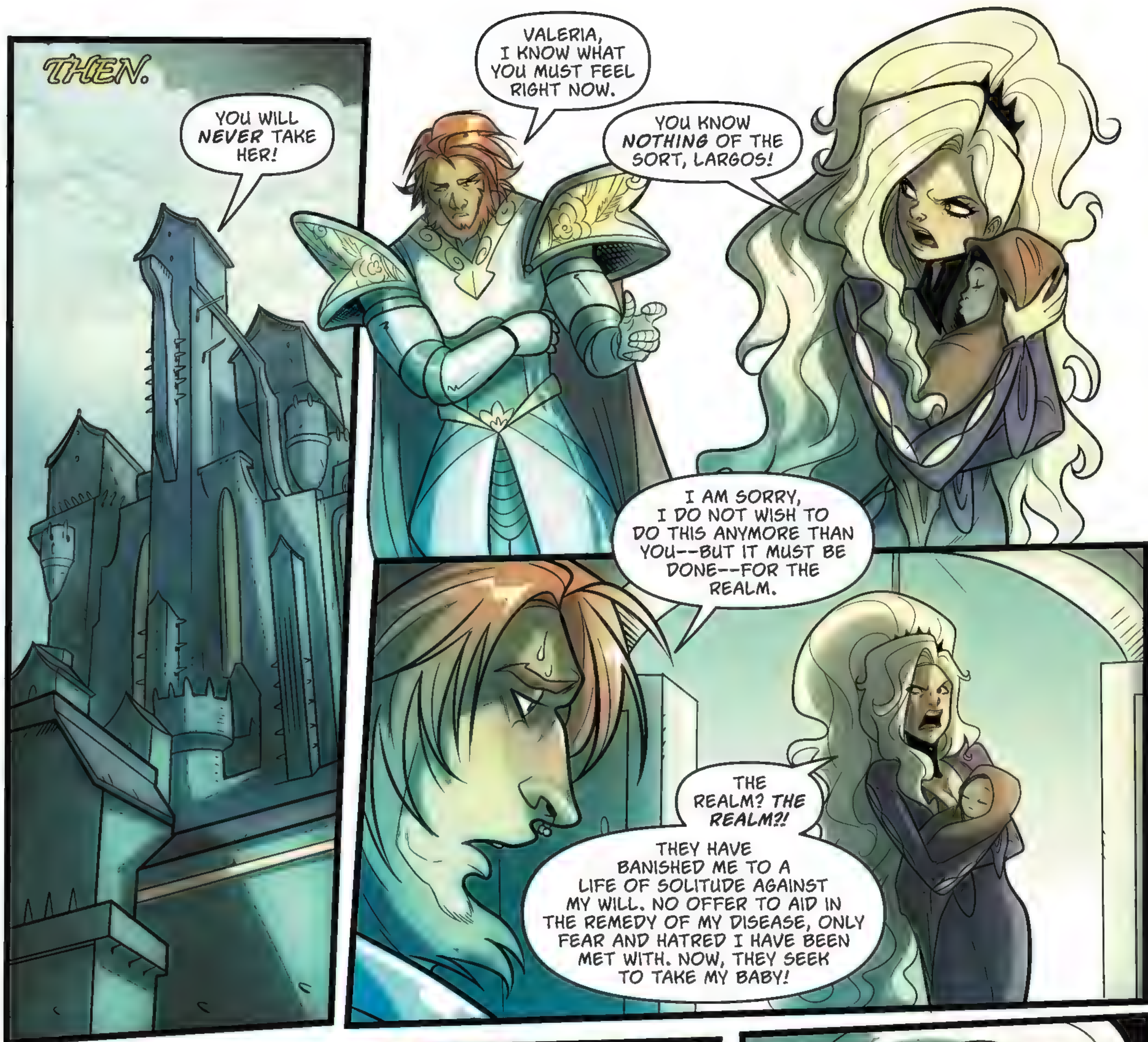
MASTER IS IN NEED OF YOUR SERVICE...TO FIND THE PRINCESS BETHANY.

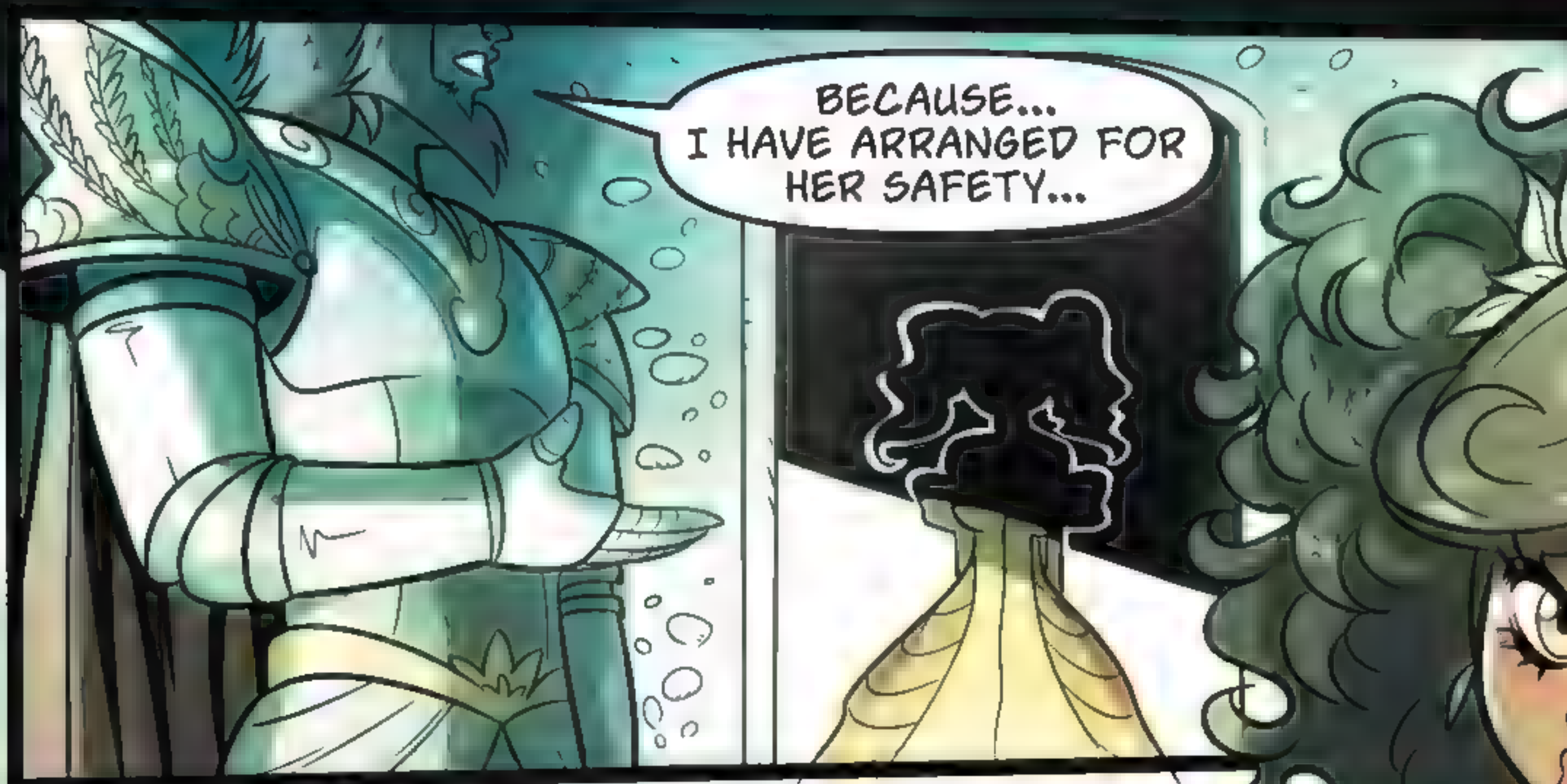
HMMPH...



I STAND CORRECTED...IT APPEARS BETHANY IS ACTUALLY THE MAIDEN OF THE BALL...

TYPICAL.





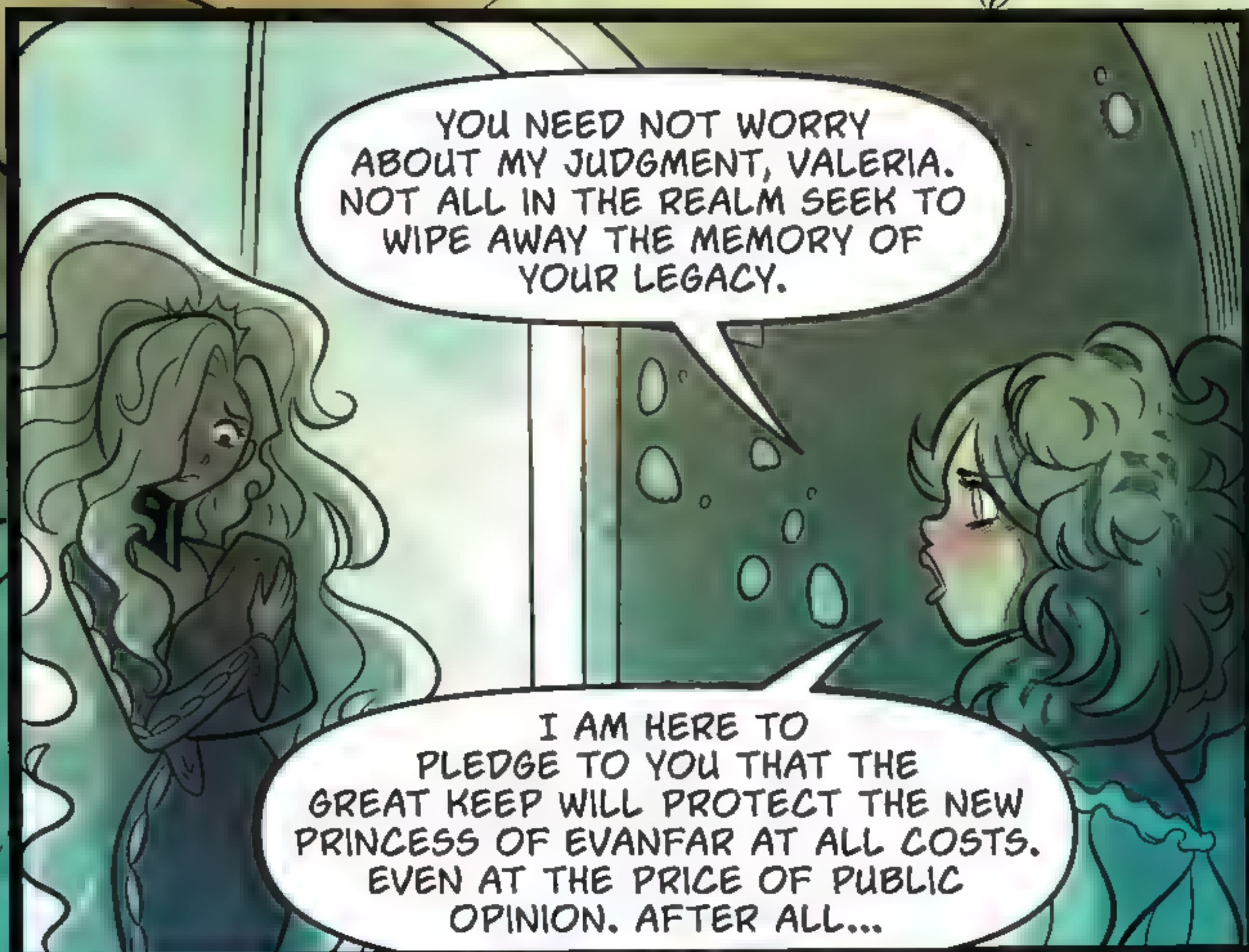
BECAUSE...
I HAVE ARRANGED FOR
HER SAFETY...



PRINCESS
BARRA?!

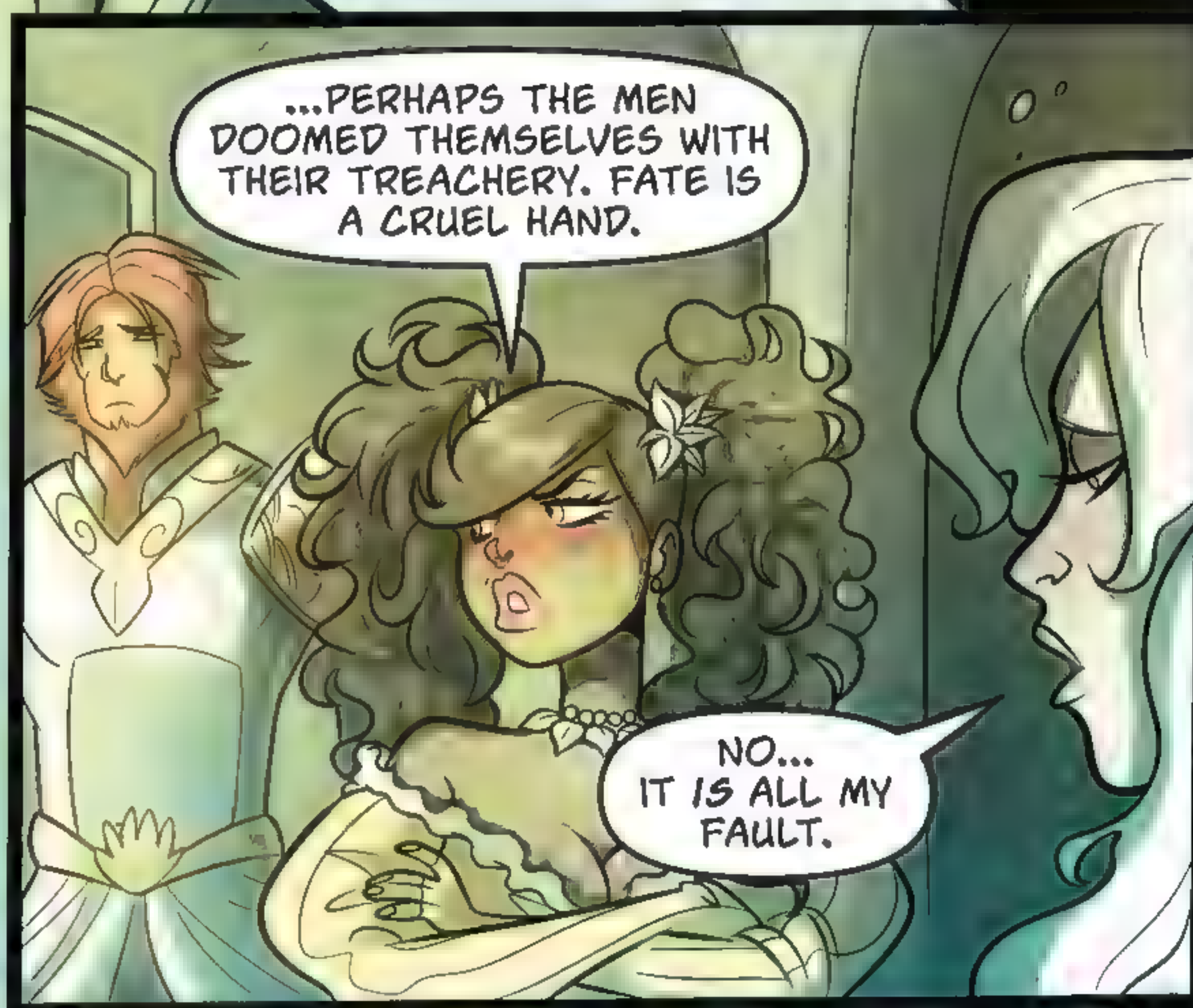
HELLO,
QUEEN
VALERIA.

I...UH...
APOLOGIES.
YOU SHOULD NOT
HAVE TO SEE A QUEEN
IN SUCH A FASHION. EVEN
IF MY CROWN HAS
BEEN STRIPPED
FROM ME.



YOU NEED NOT WORRY
ABOUT MY JUDGMENT, VALERIA.
NOT ALL IN THE REALM SEEK TO
WIPE AWAY THE MEMORY OF
YOUR LEGACY.

I AM HERE TO
PLEDGE TO YOU THAT THE
GREAT KEEP WILL PROTECT THE NEW
PRINCESS OF EVANFAR AT ALL COSTS.
EVEN AT THE PRICE OF PUBLIC
OPINION. AFTER ALL...



...PERHAPS THE MEN
DOOMED THEMSELVES WITH
THEIR TREACHERY. FATE IS
A CRUEL HAND.

NO...
IT IS ALL MY
FAULT.



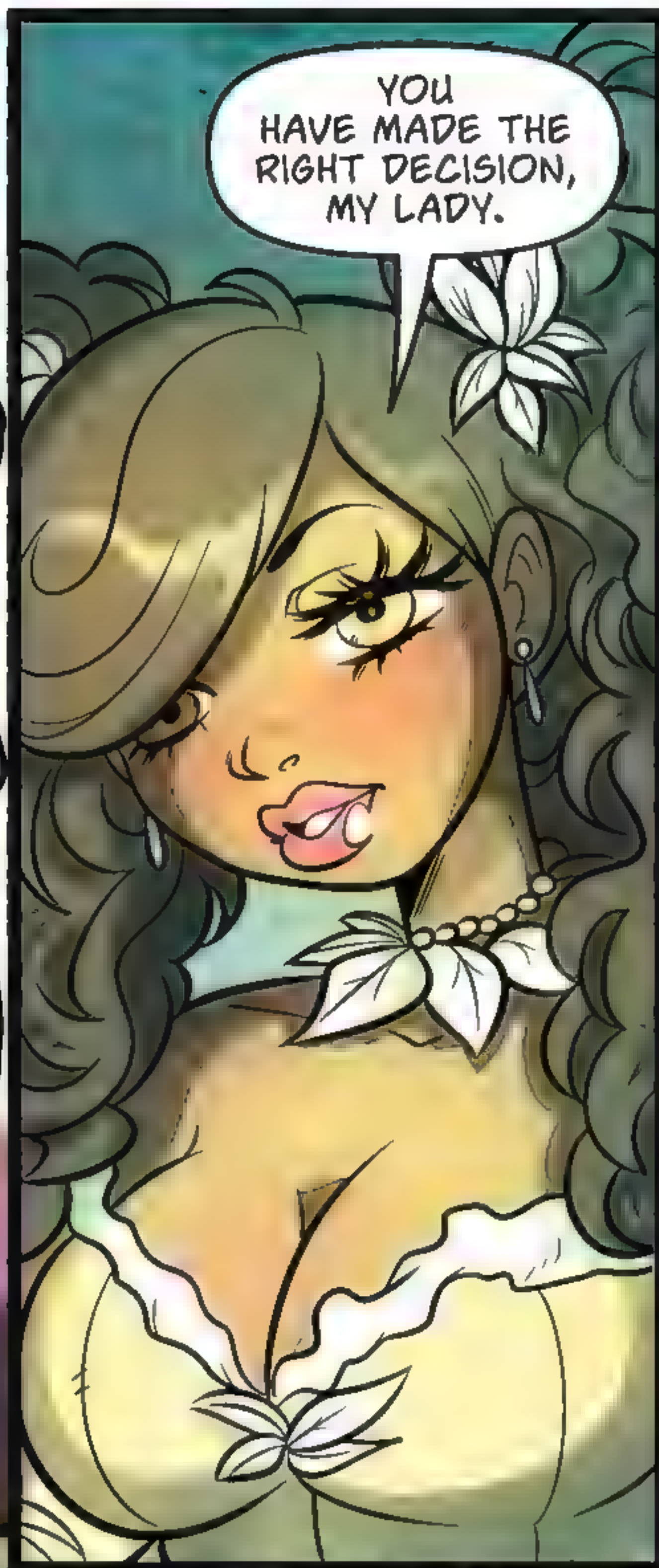
YOU STILL
CAN MAKE THE
RIGHT DECISION HERE,
QUEEN. THE REALMS MAY
NOT FORGIVE YOU NOW,
BUT IN TIME, A CURE CAN
BE FOUND. WITH BETHANY
ON THE THRONE, YOU MAY
YET HAVE YOUR LIFE
BACK SOME
DAY.



...



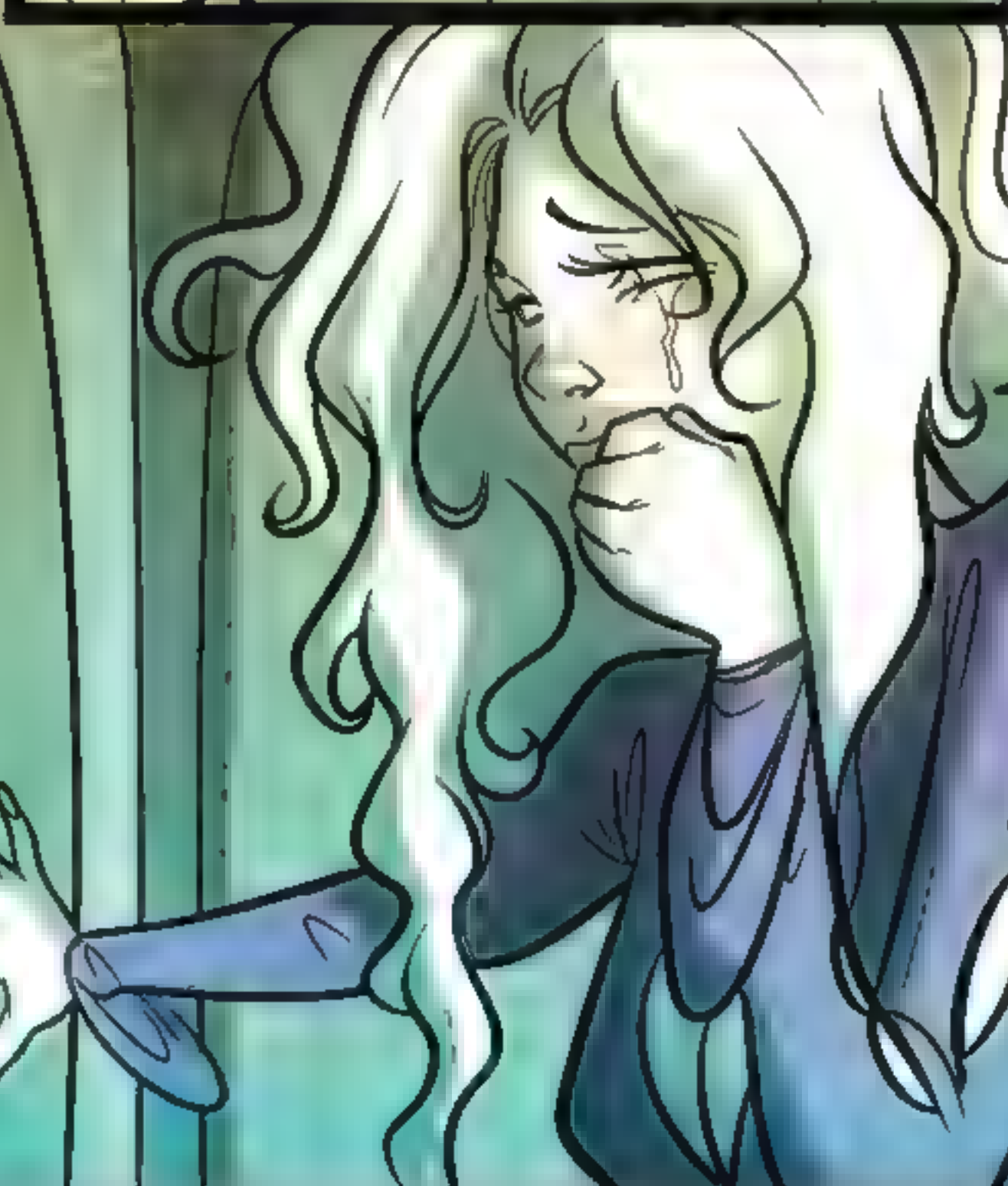
...OKAY.



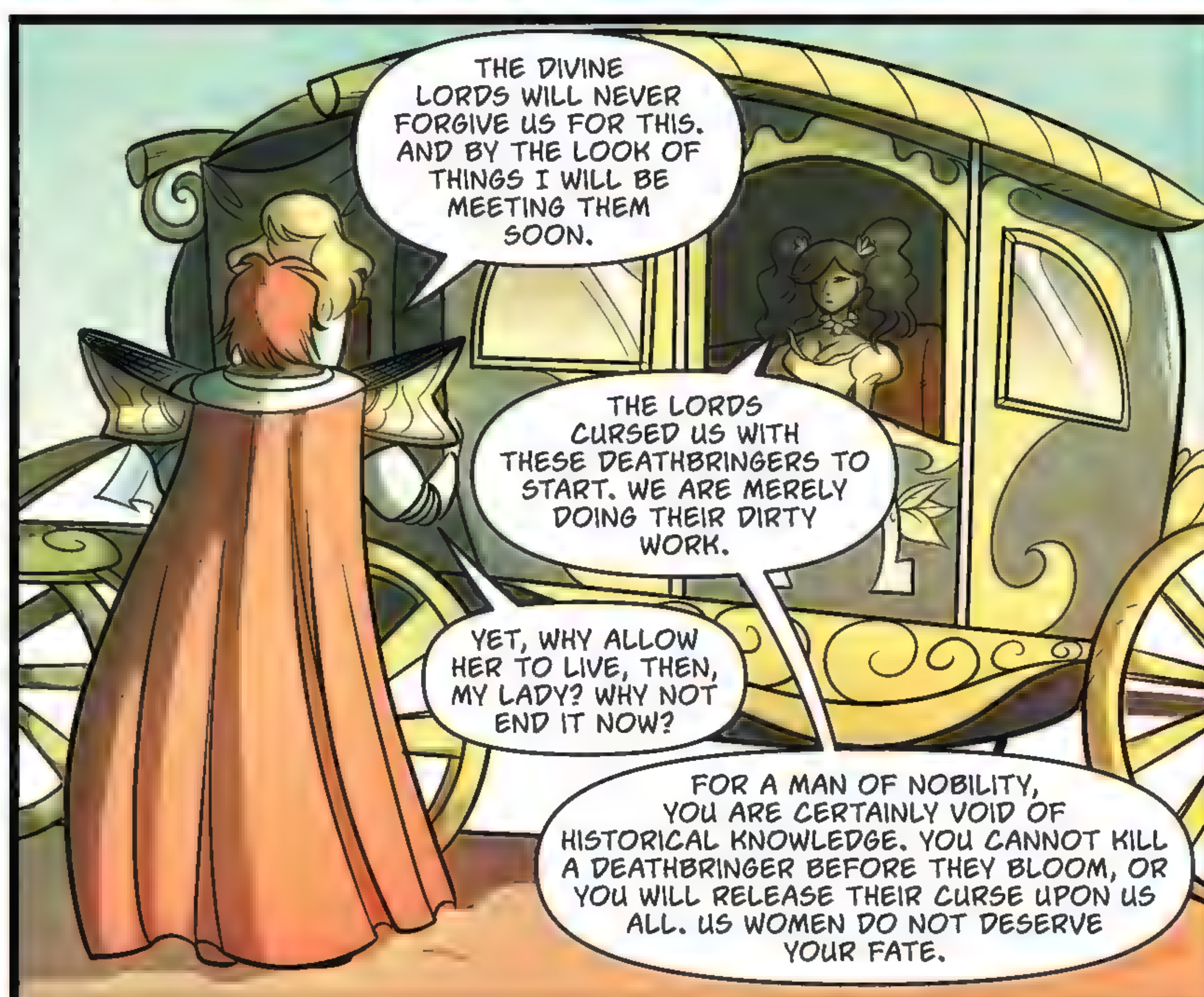
YOU HAVE MADE THE RIGHT DECISION, MY LADY.



NO HARM WILL COME TO HER, YOU HAVE MY WORD.



GOODBYE...
=SOBE...MY CHILD.

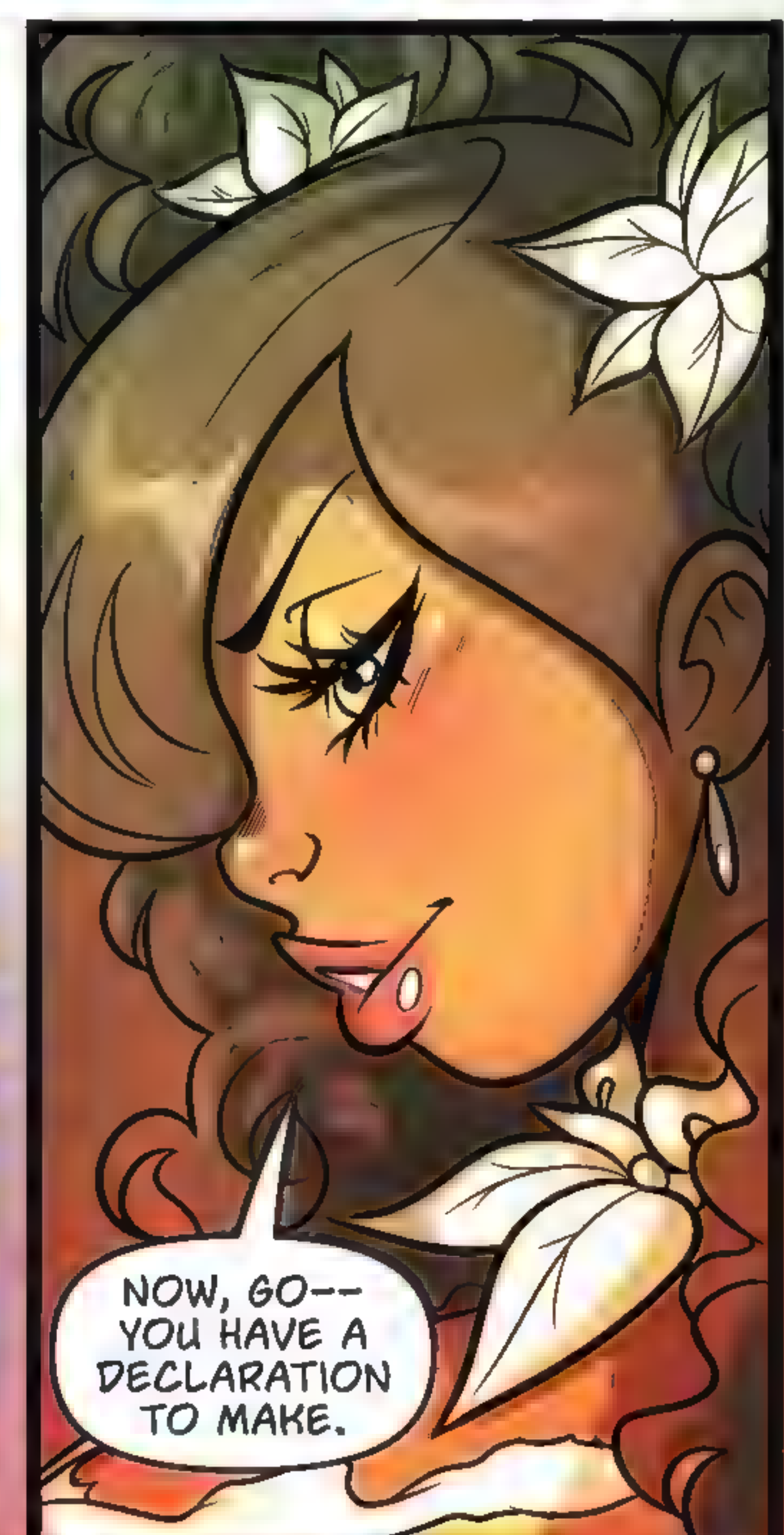


THE DIVINE LORDS WILL NEVER FORGIVE US FOR THIS. AND BY THE LOOK OF THINGS I WILL BE MEETING THEM SOON.

THE LORDS CURSED US WITH THESE DEATHBRINGERS TO START. WE ARE MERELY DOING THEIR DIRTY WORK.

YET, WHY ALLOW HER TO LIVE, THEN, MY LADY? WHY NOT END IT NOW?

FOR A MAN OF NOBILITY, YOU ARE CERTAINLY VOID OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE. YOU CANNOT KILL A DEATHBRINGER BEFORE THEY BLOOM, OR YOU WILL RELEASE THEIR CURSE UPON US ALL. US WOMEN DO NOT DESERVE YOUR FATE.



NOW, GO--
YOU HAVE A DECLARATION TO MAKE.

THEY
THINK THEY CAN
TAKE EVERYTHING
FROM ME.

TAKE,
TAKE, TAKE!

MY REIGN,
MY LIFE--AND NOW
MY FAMILY...

...WE WILL
SHOW THEM
ALL...

...MY SWEET
DEVONESS. ONE
DAY YOUR SISTER
BETHANY WILL RETURN
TO US, AND OUR
FAMILY WILL BE
REUNITED.

TO BE CONTINUED!

Damsels In Excess

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THE TIES THAT BIND

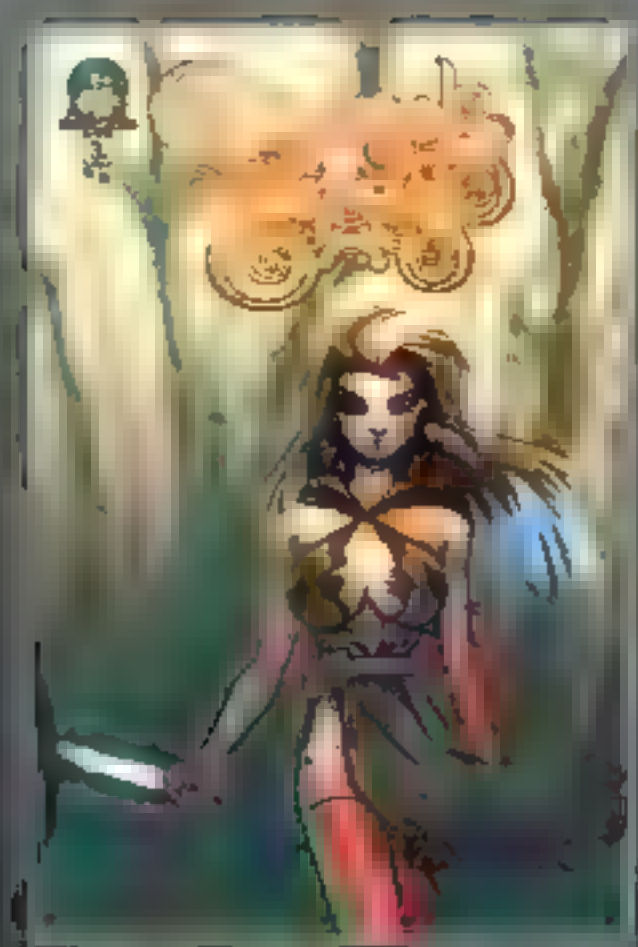
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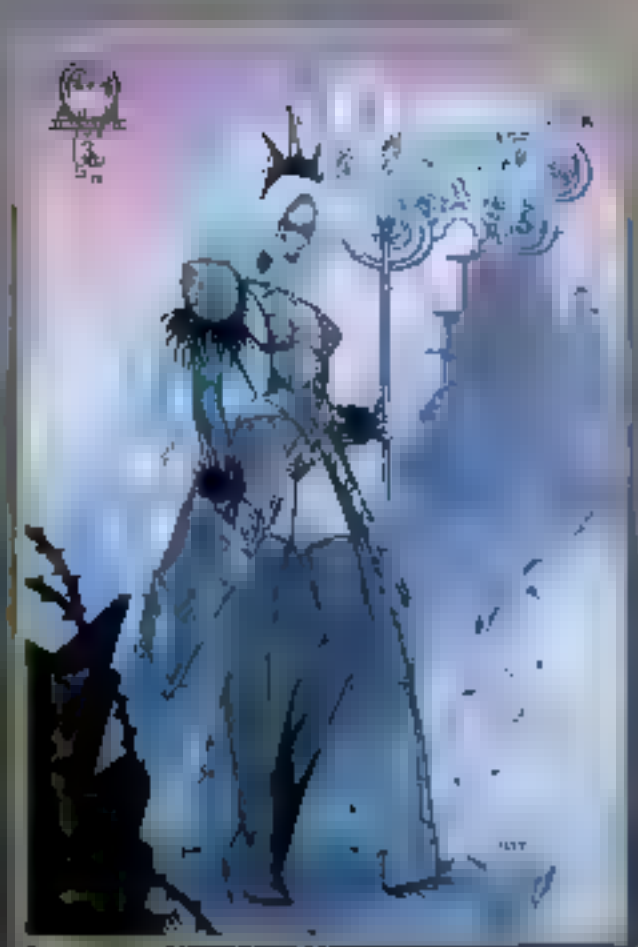
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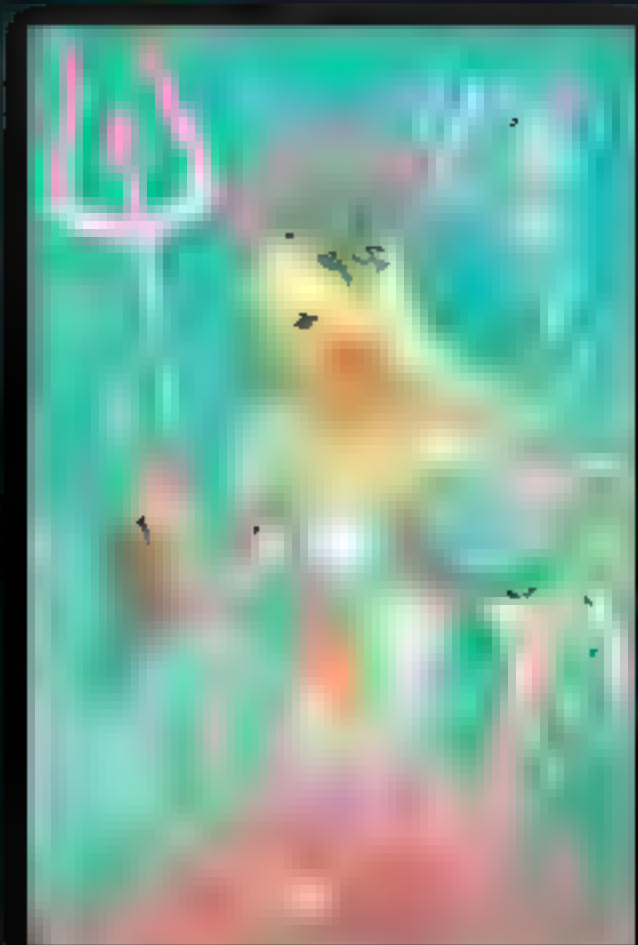
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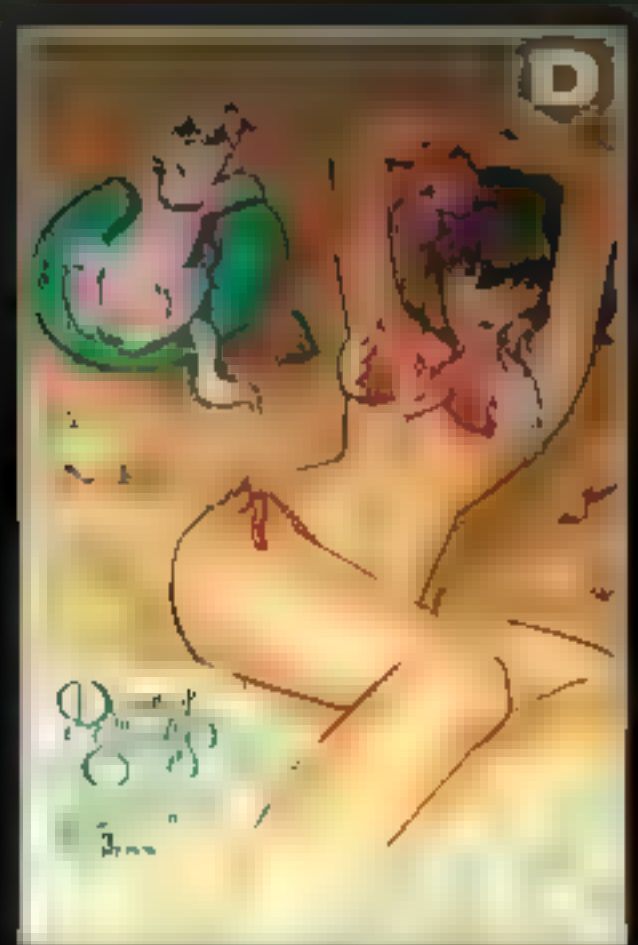
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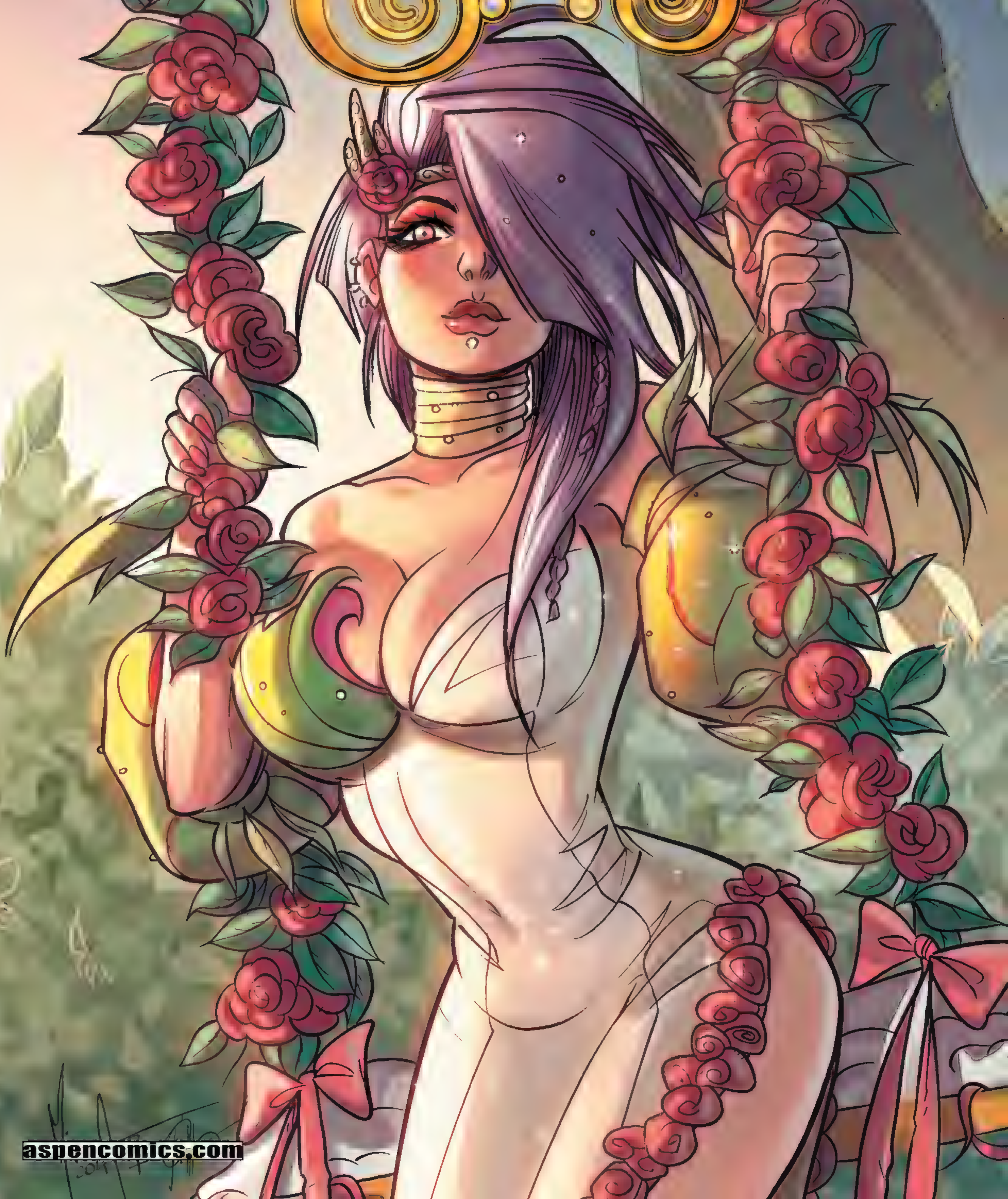
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MAP OF THE FIVE REALMS



Parasak

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Vol. 1

#4

OF 5

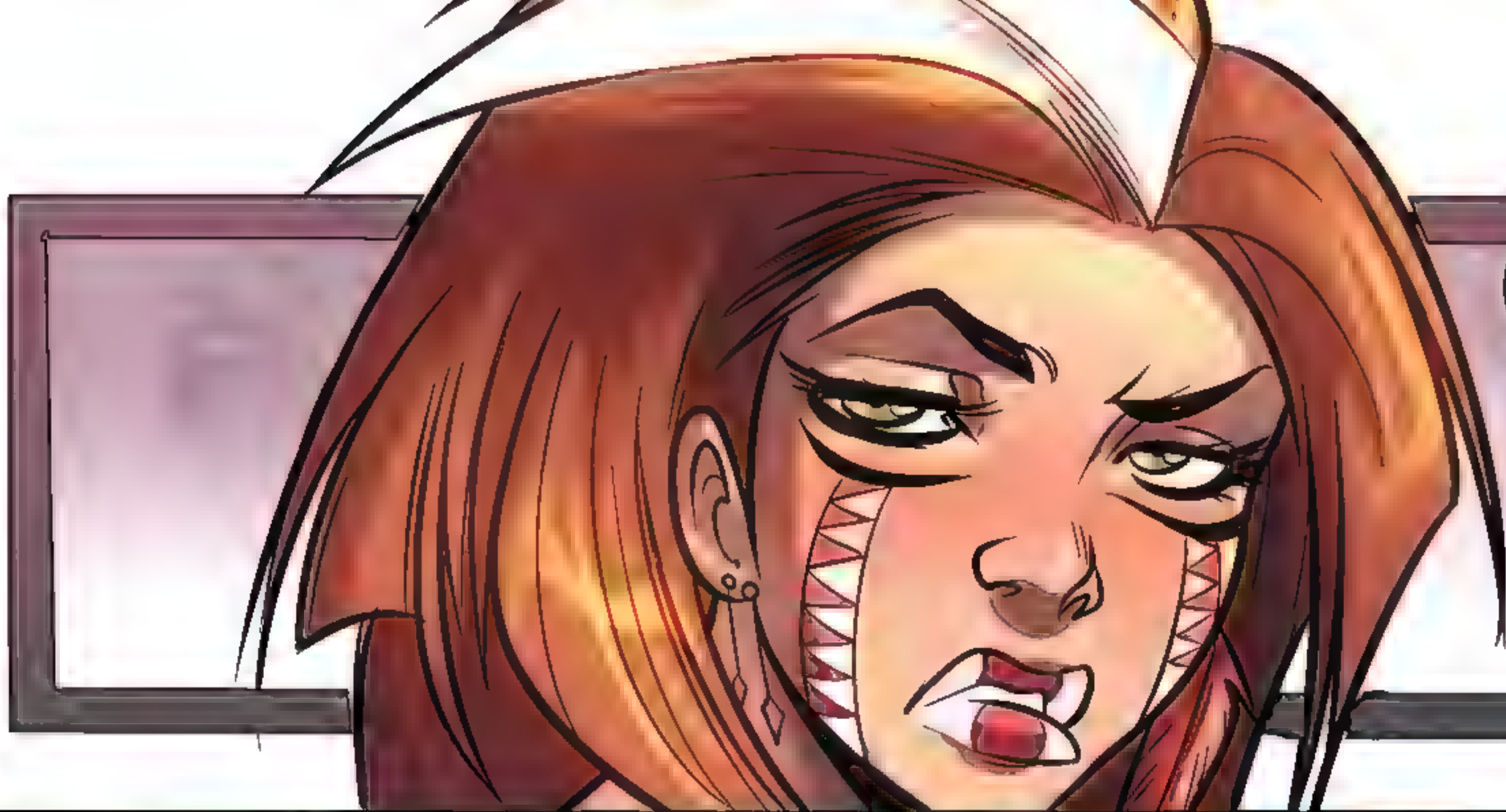
COVER B

Darkseek



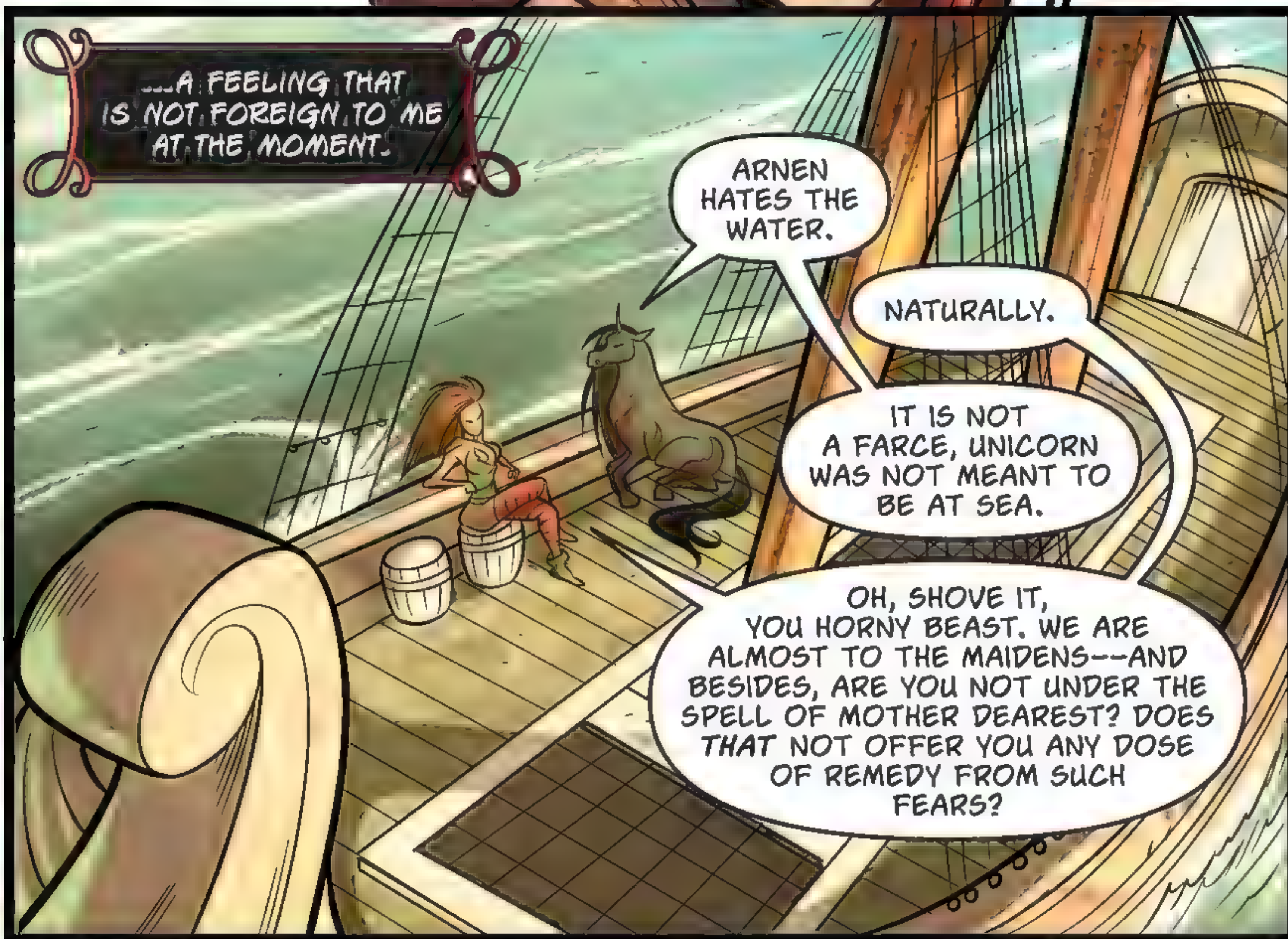


“She will never see us coming.”



YES, SO WHAT.
VALERIA IS MY MOTHER, AND
BETHANY MY...SISTER--IF YOU
CAN CALL HER THAT.

TO BE HONEST,
MY LOVELY SIS CAN
OFTENTIMES DEFINE
ANNOYANCE FOR
ME...



...A FEELING THAT
IS NOT FOREIGN TO ME
AT THE MOMENT.

ARNEN
HATES THE
WATER.

NATURALLY.

IT IS NOT
A FARCE, UNICORN
WAS NOT MEANT TO
BE AT SEA.

OH, SHOVE IT,
YOU HORNY BEAST. WE ARE
ALMOST TO THE MAIDENS--AND
BESIDES, ARE YOU NOT UNDER THE
SPELL OF MOTHER DEAREST? DOES
THAT NOT OFFER YOU ANY DOSE
OF REMEDY FROM SUCH
FEARS?



THE QUEEN OF
SHADOWS MAY CONTROL
ARNEN'S ACTIONS, BUT
ARNEN'S FEELINGS ARE
ANOTHER MATTER.

OH, DEAR--



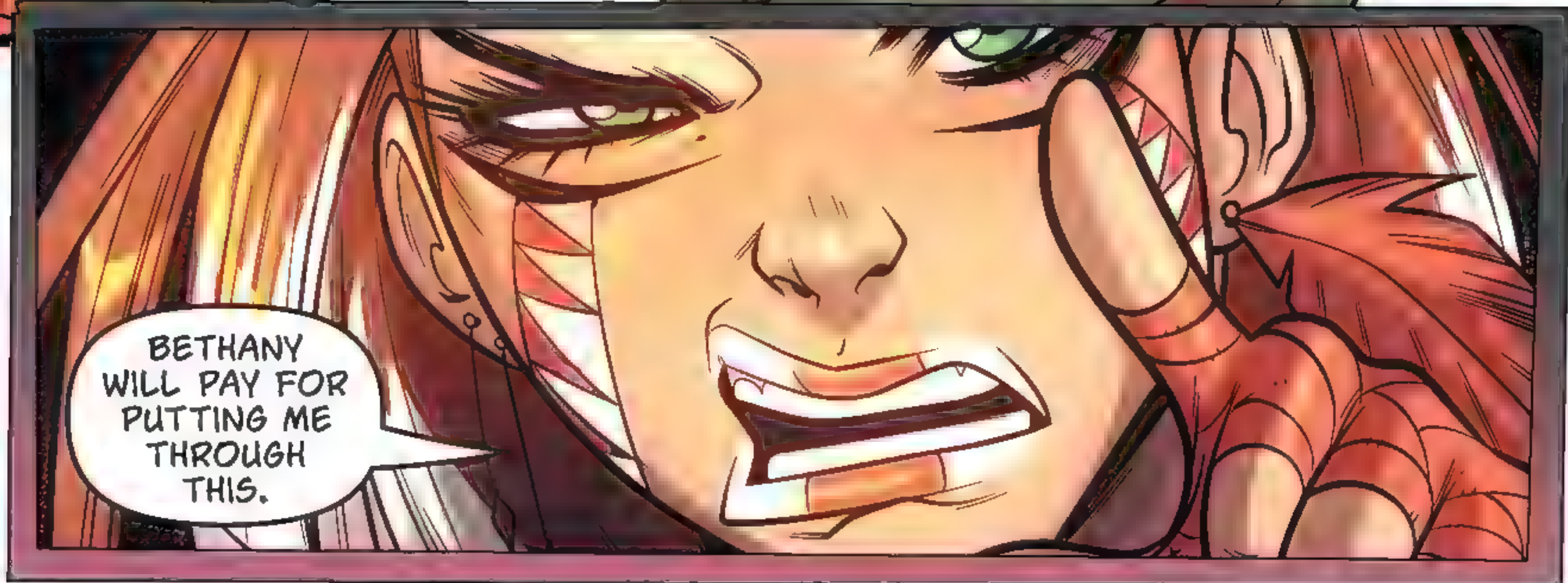
--GET ME
OFF THIS SHIP
AND AWAY FROM
THIS SHIVERING
BABY!

ARNEN WILL
REMINDE YOU
THAT YOU NEED
ARNEN.



AND LET ME
REMINDE YOU THAT I
NEED NO ONE. I SIMPLY
DO NOT WANT TO DEAL WITH
MOTHER'S ENDLESS RANTS
IF I HURT ONE OF HER
PRECIOUS TOYS.

ARNEN IS
NOT A TOY,
ARNEN IS A
UNICORN!



BETHANY
WILL PAY FOR
PUTTING ME
THROUGH
THIS.

EVANEAR



THE CITY
IS LOST!

ALL
BATTALIONS
RETREAT TO
CASTLE
DARK!

LOOK AT
THEM...

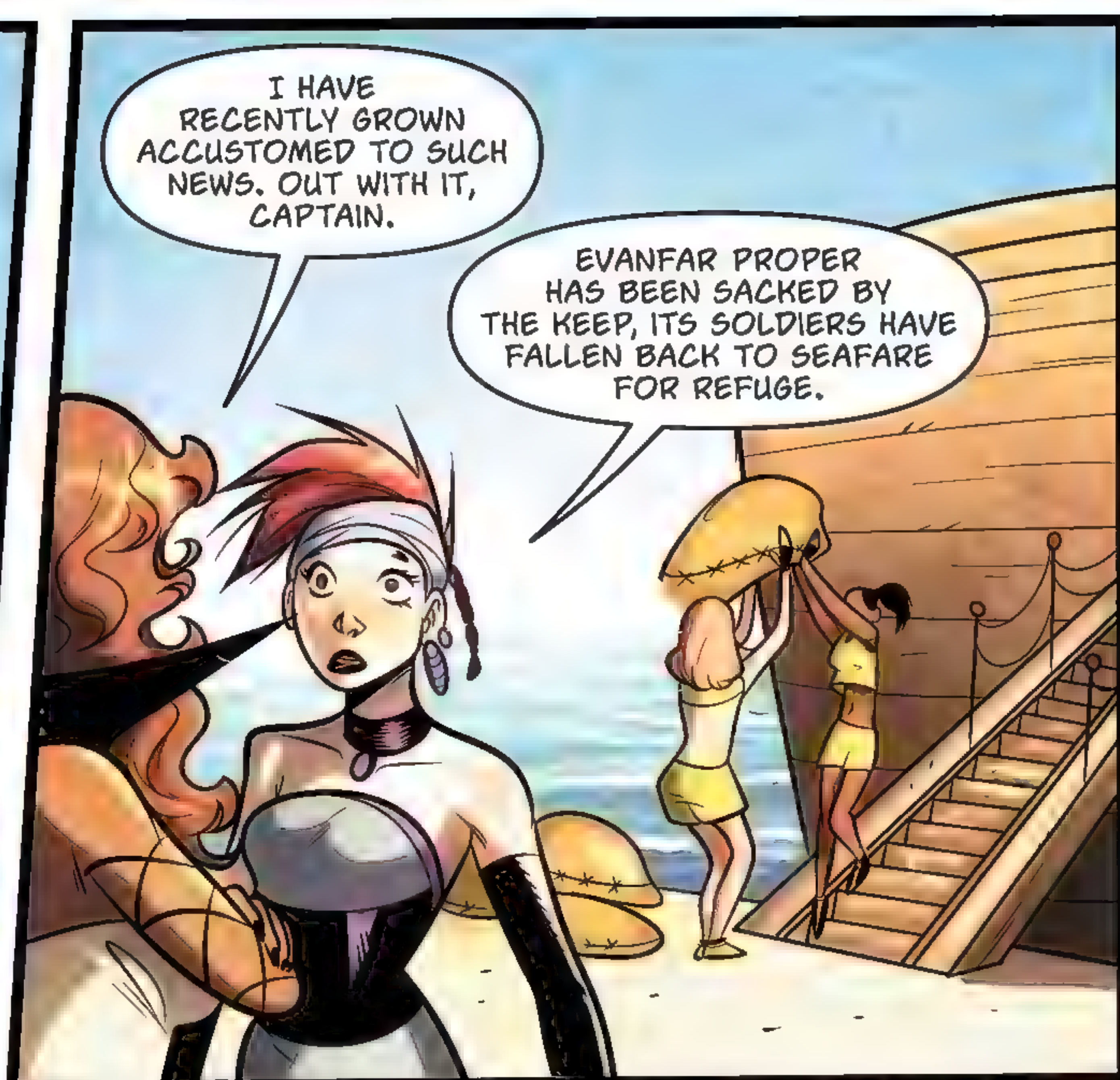
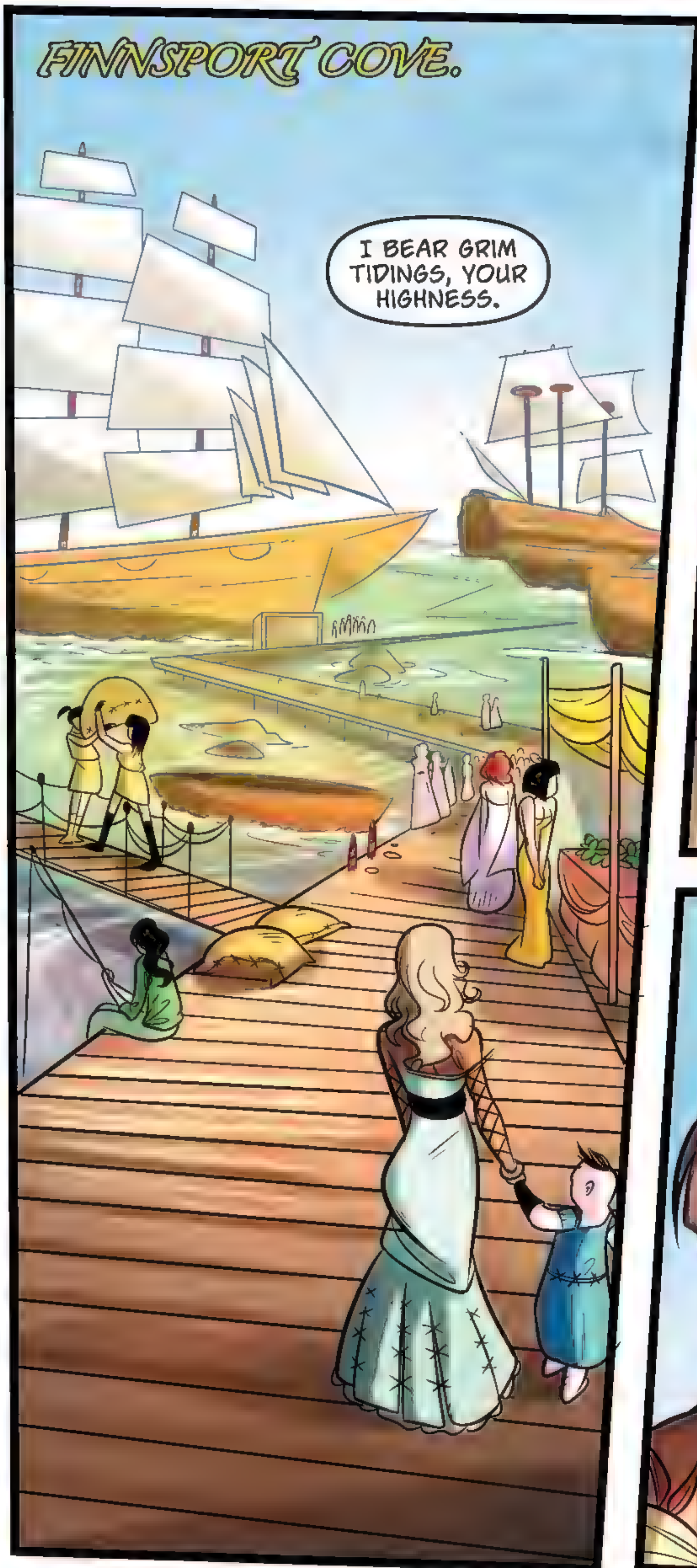
...I NEVER THOUGHT
I WOULD SAY THIS, BUT
PERHAPS BETHANY MEANT MORE
TO THEM THAN I PRESUMED.
WITHOUT HER THEY FLEE
LIKE RATS.

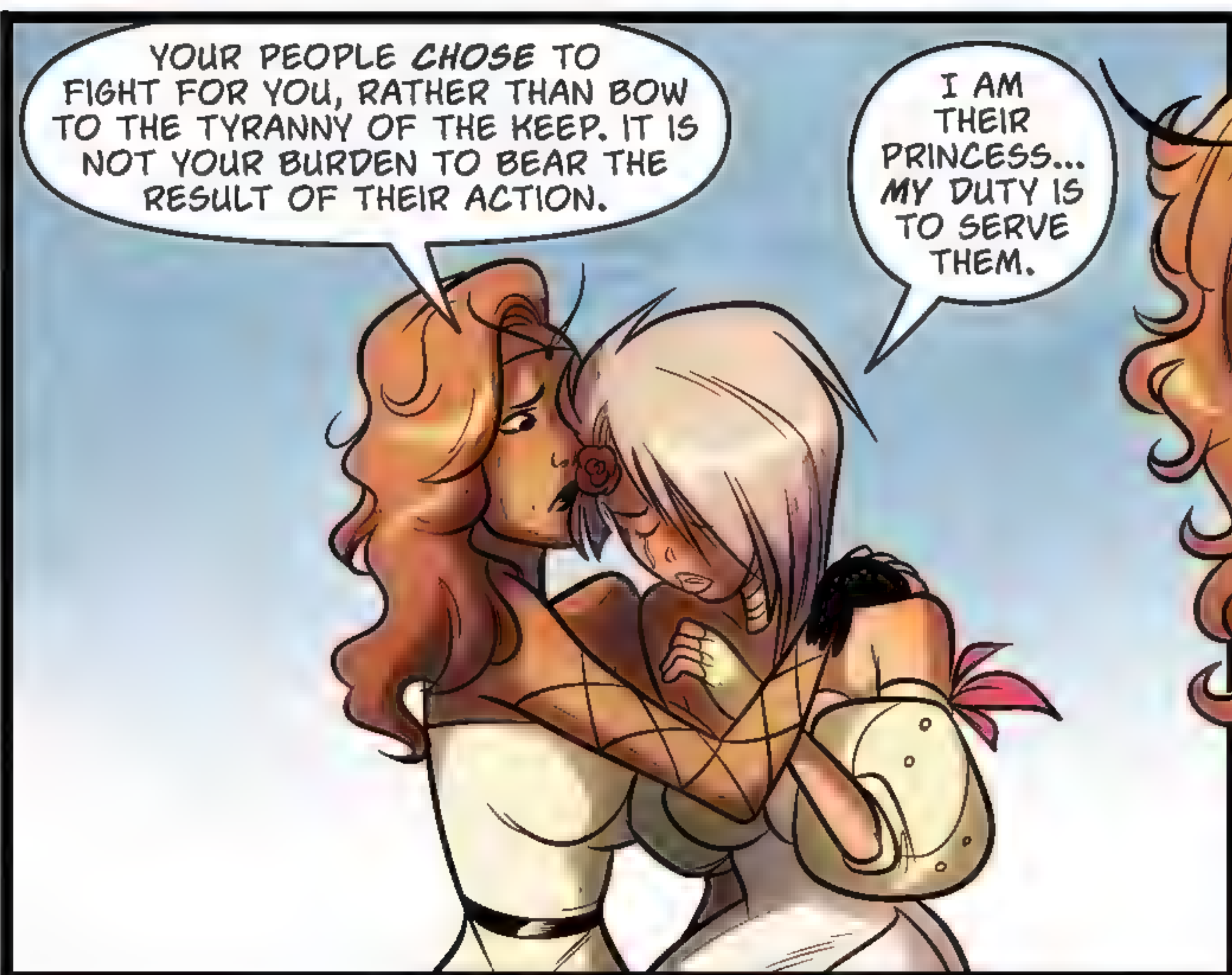
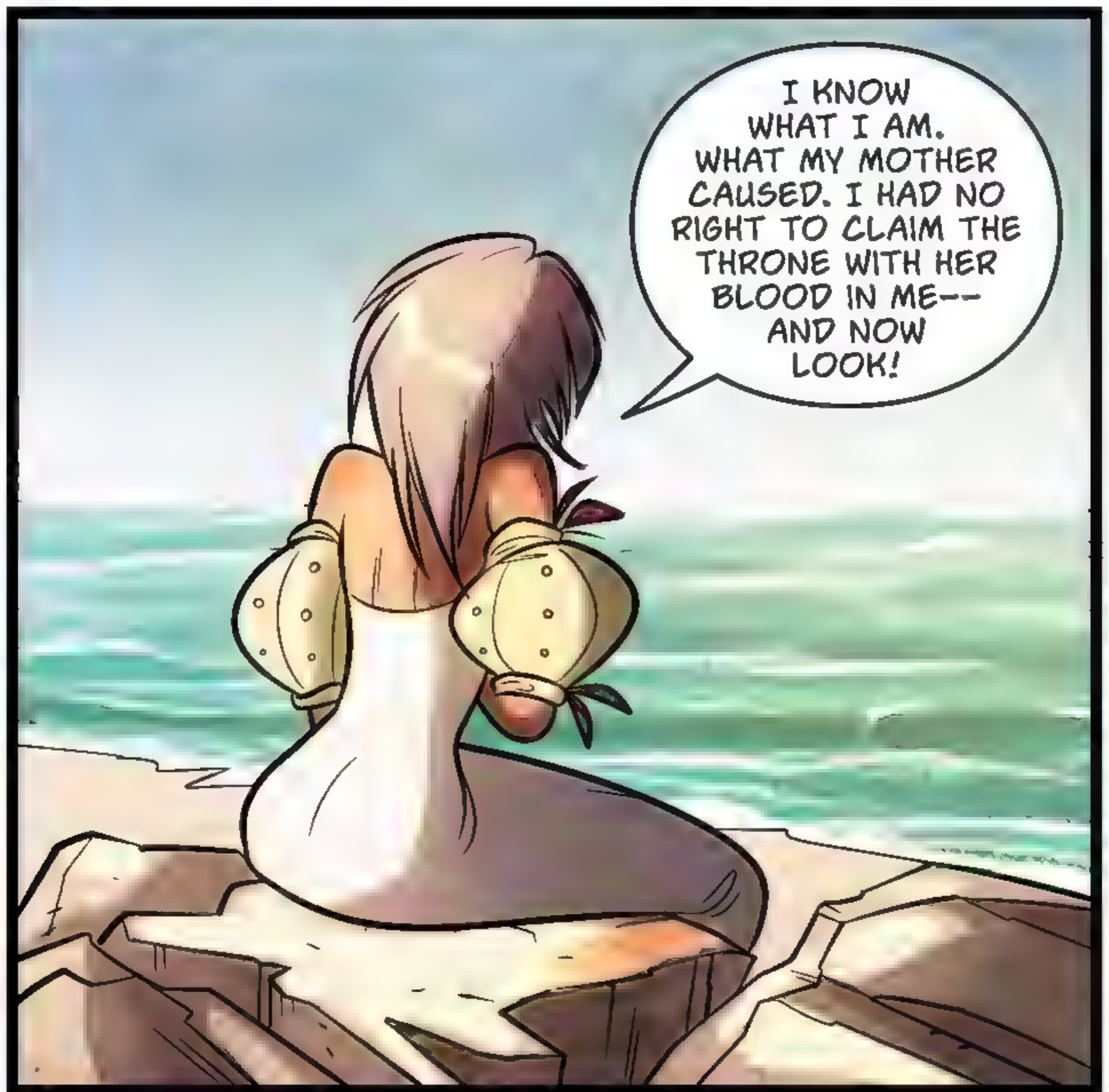
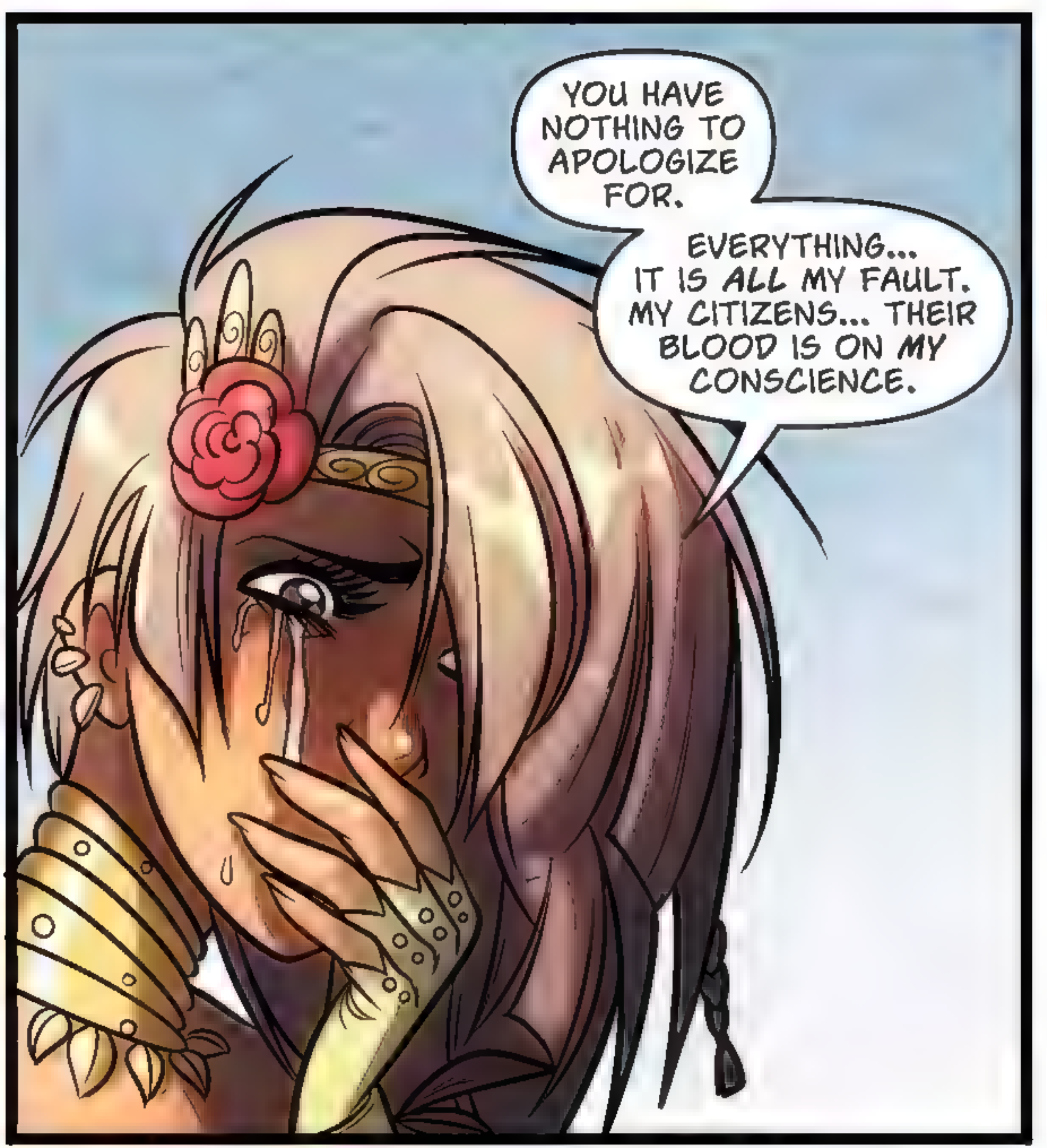
VERMIN AT LEAST
HAVE THE DECENCY TO
DIE WITH EASE. HER ARMY
IMPARTED QUITE THE
CHALLENGE.

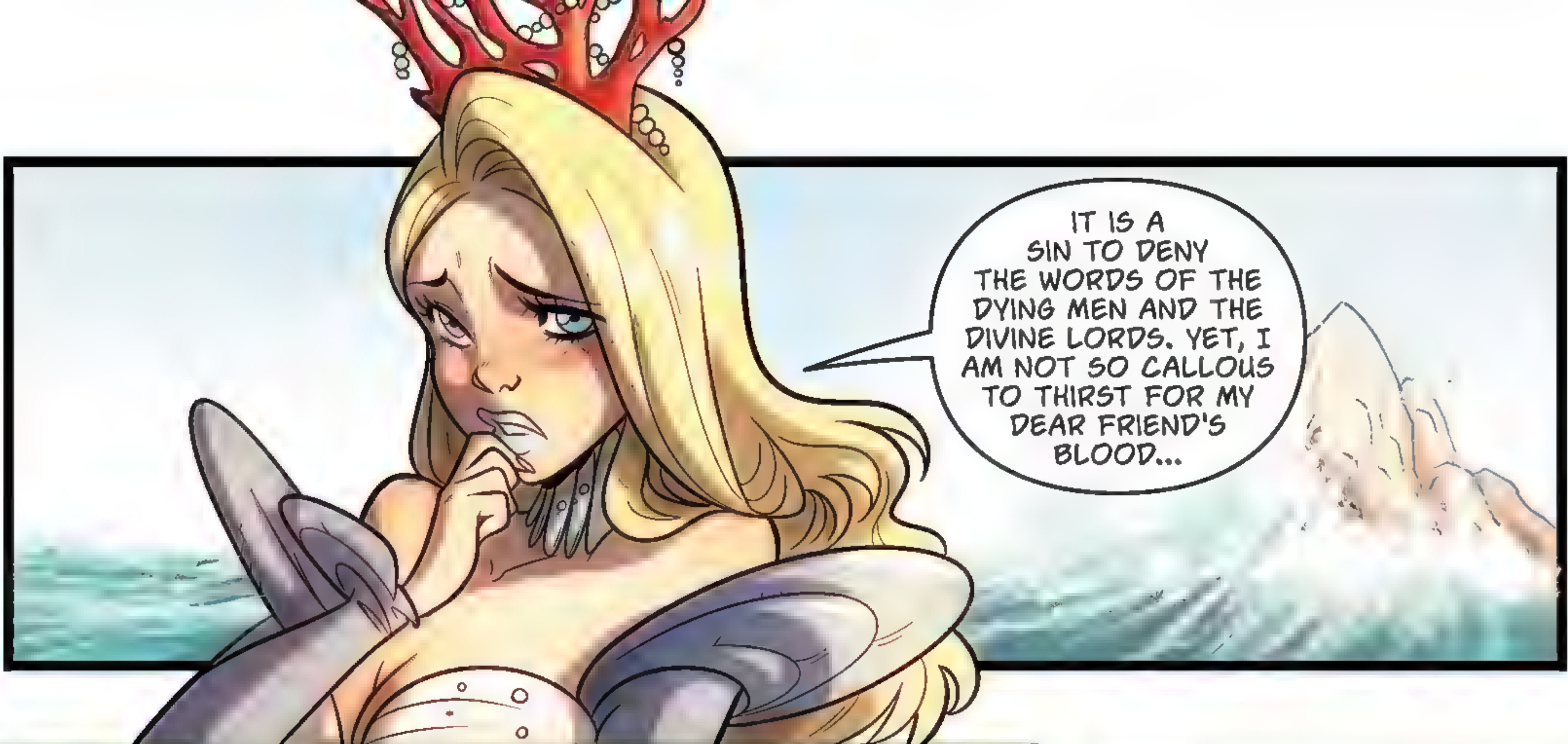
IT IS A NUMBERS
GAME, MY DEAR. SHE
HAS SOLDIERS--YET, I
HAVE MORE. SIMPLE,
REALLY.

YOUR
HIGHNESS.

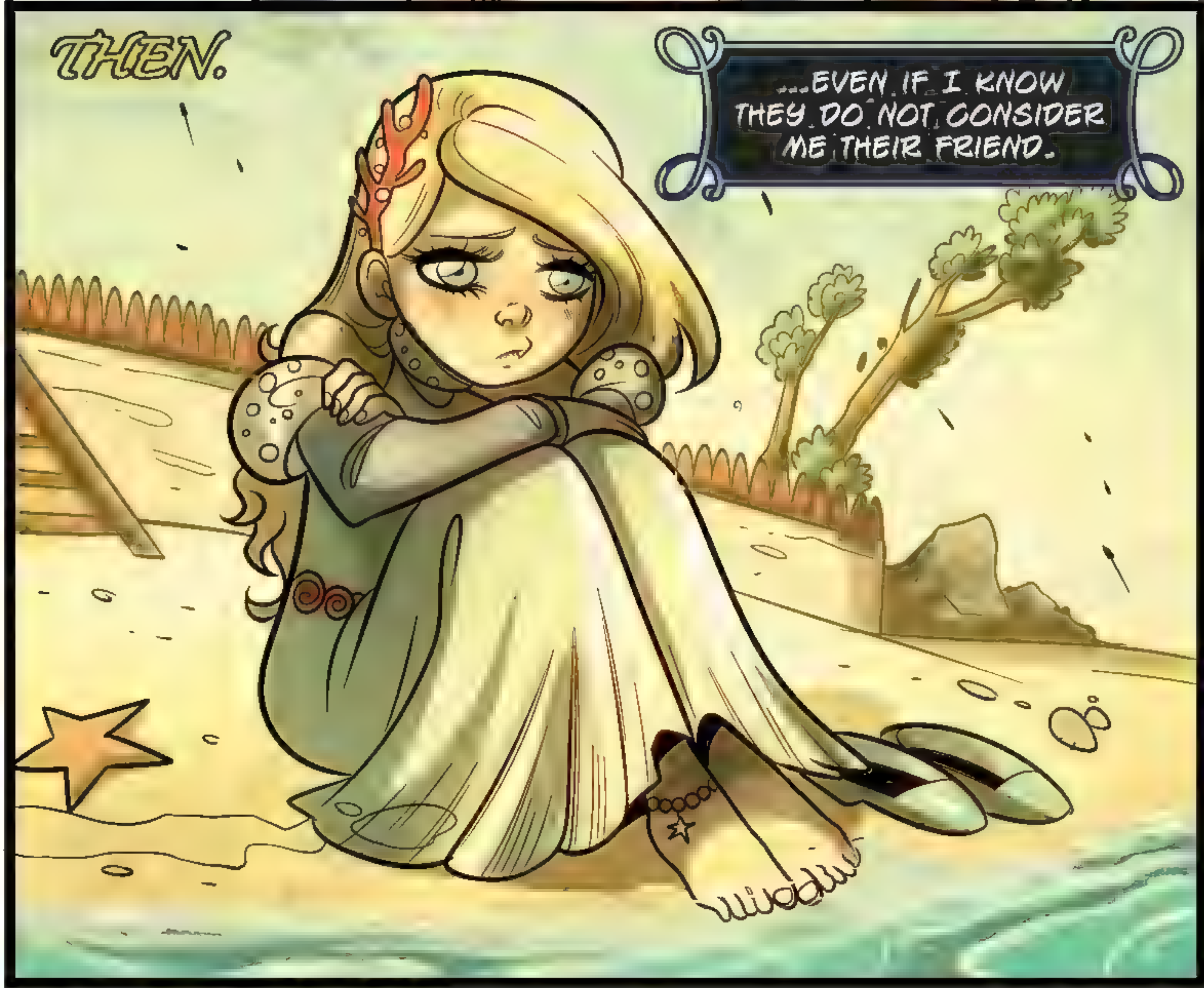
NOW, CLEAR
BETHANY'S
CASTLE FOR MY
ARRIVAL.





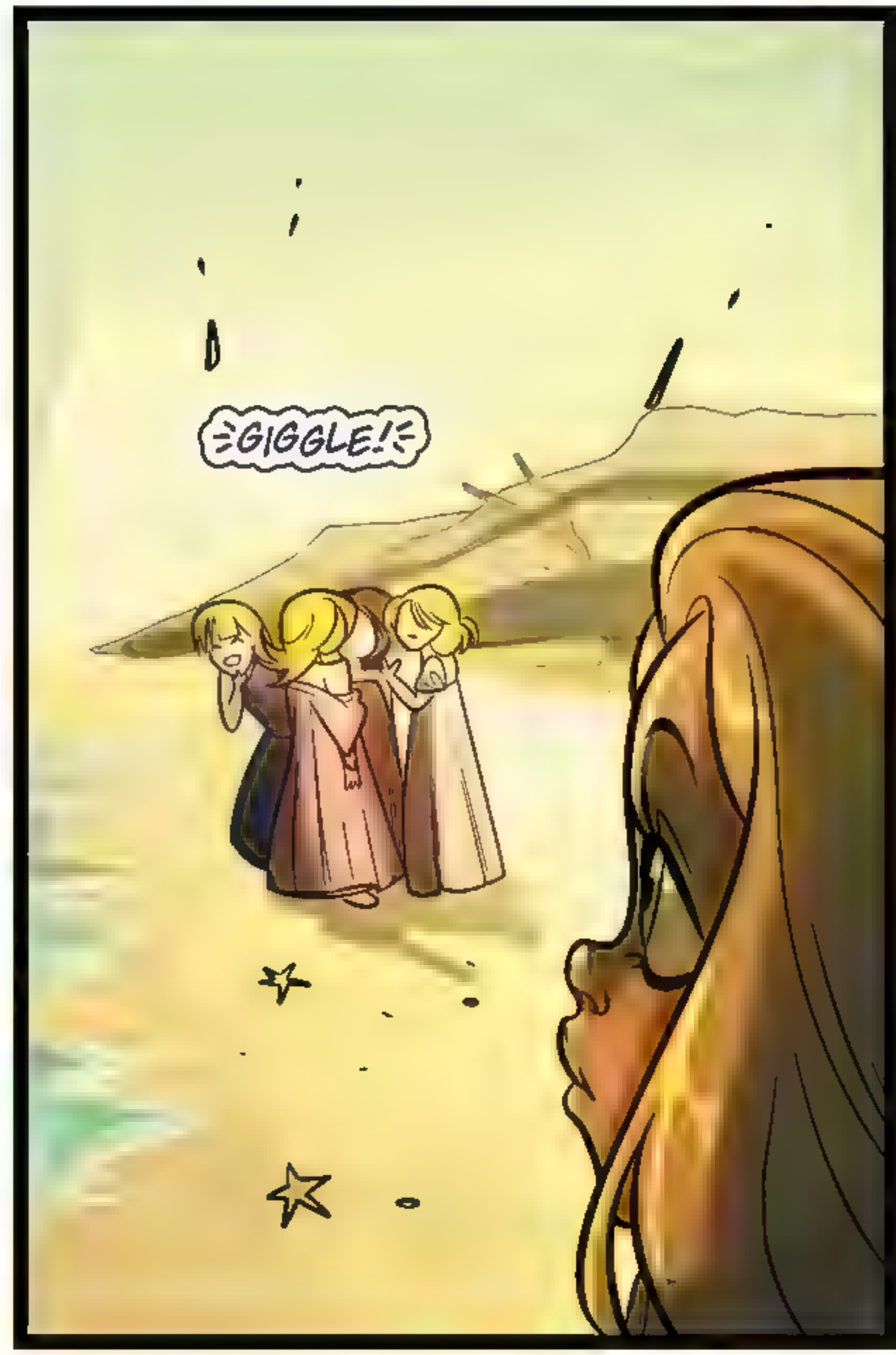


IT IS A SIN TO DENY THE WORDS OF THE DYING MEN AND THE DIVINE LORDS. YET, I AM NOT SO CALLOUS TO THIRST FOR MY DEAR FRIEND'S BLOOD...



THEN.

...EVEN IF I KNOW THEY DO NOT CONSIDER ME THEIR FRIEND.



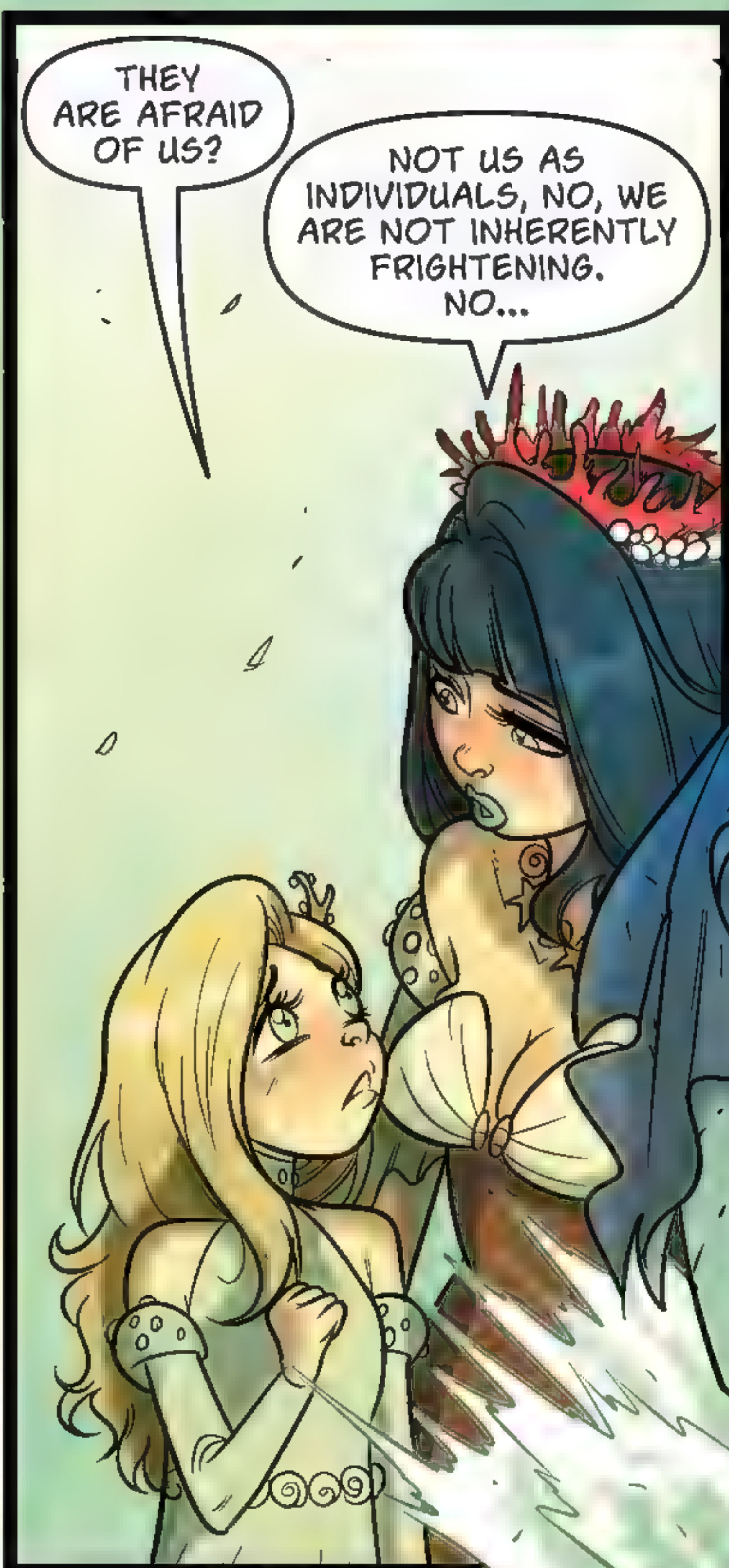
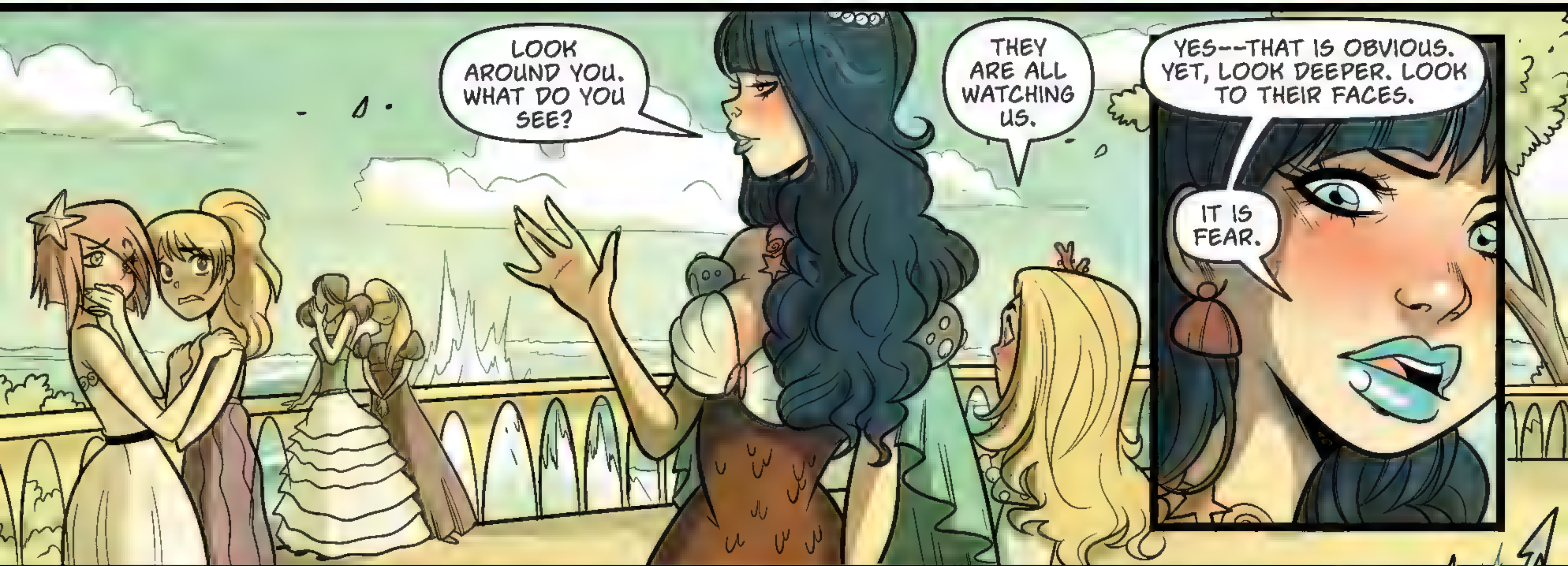
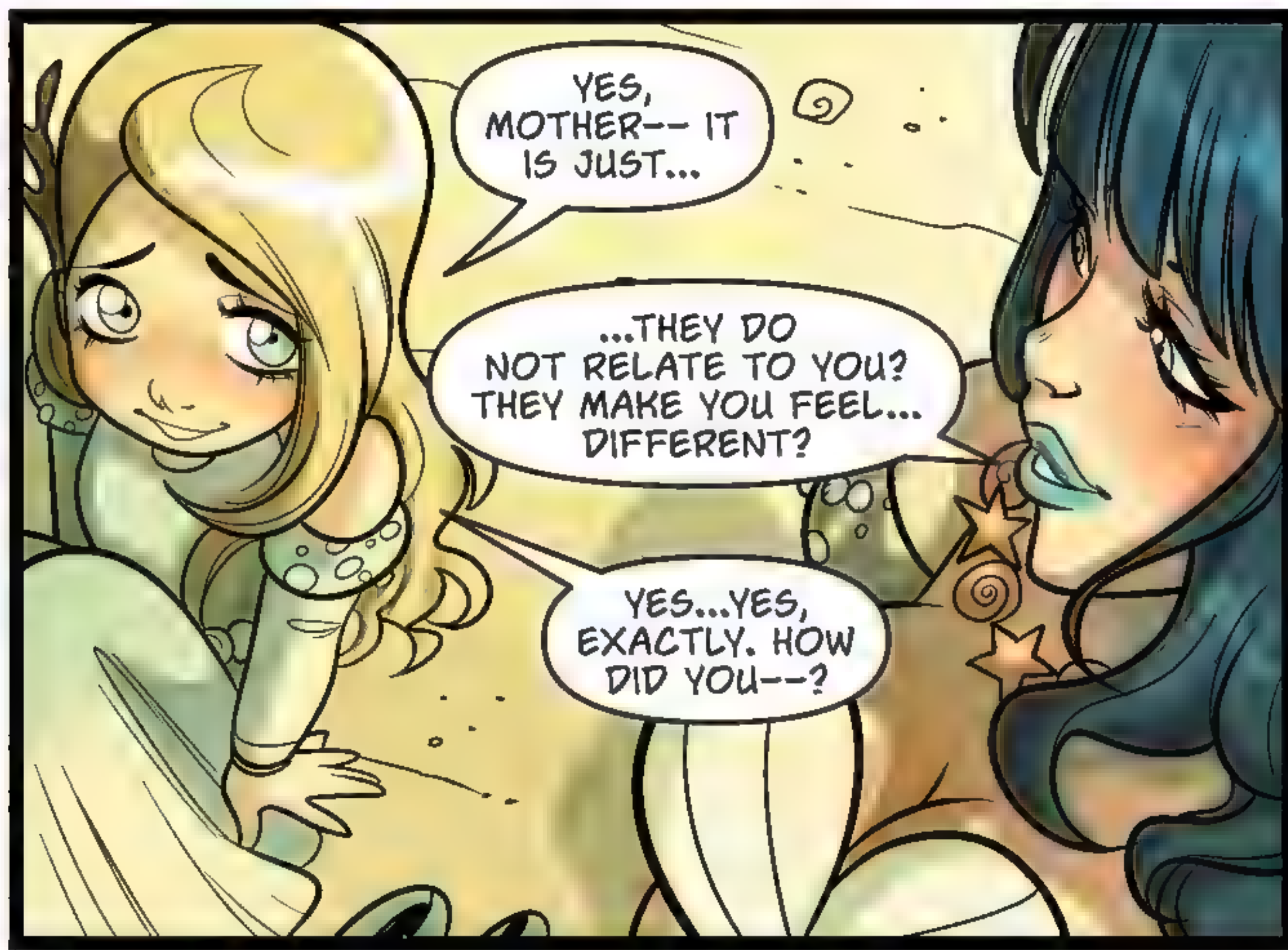
≡GIGGLE!≡

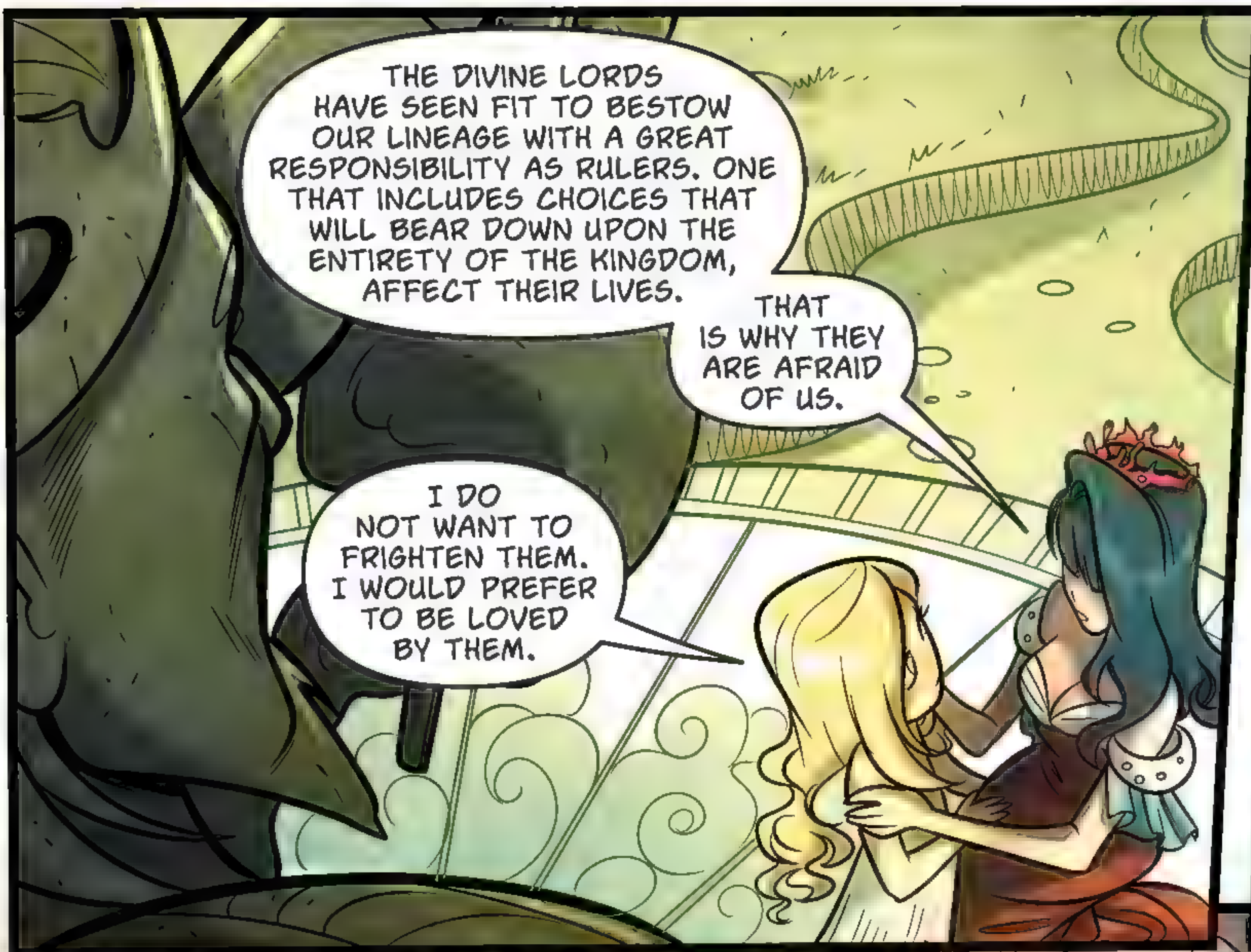


YOU KNOW YOU CAN TRY TO TALK TO THEM FOR ONCE?



THEY ARE JUST GIRLS, ILINA.





THE DIVINE LORDS
HAVE SEEN FIT TO BESTOW
OUR LINEAGE WITH A GREAT
RESPONSIBILITY AS RULERS. ONE
THAT INCLUDES CHOICES THAT
WILL BEAR DOWN UPON THE
ENTIRETY OF THE KINGDOM,
AFFECT THEIR LIVES.

THAT
IS WHY THEY
ARE AFRAID
OF US.

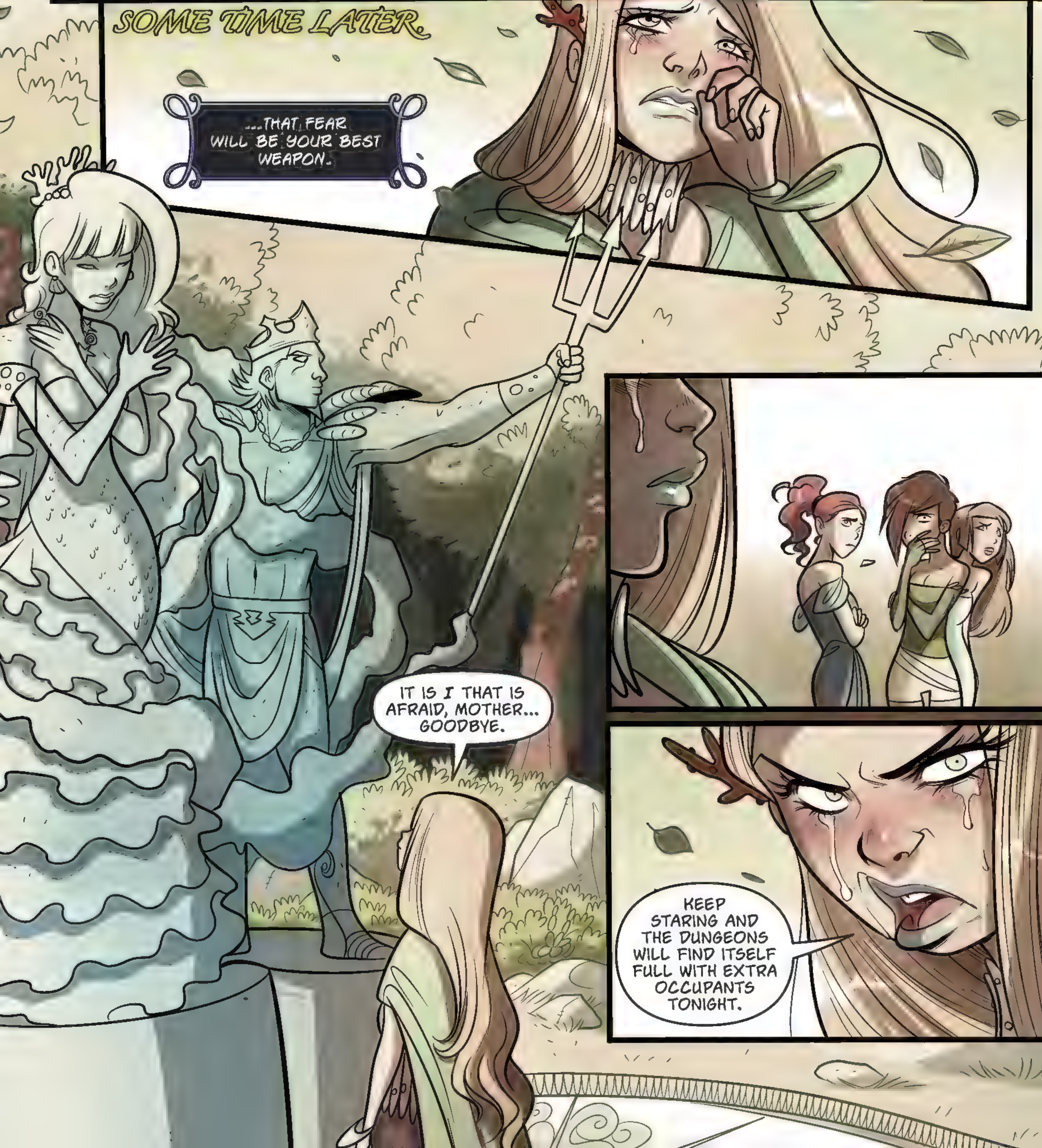
I DO
NOT WANT TO
FRIGHTEN THEM.
I WOULD PREFER
TO BE LOVED
BY THEM.



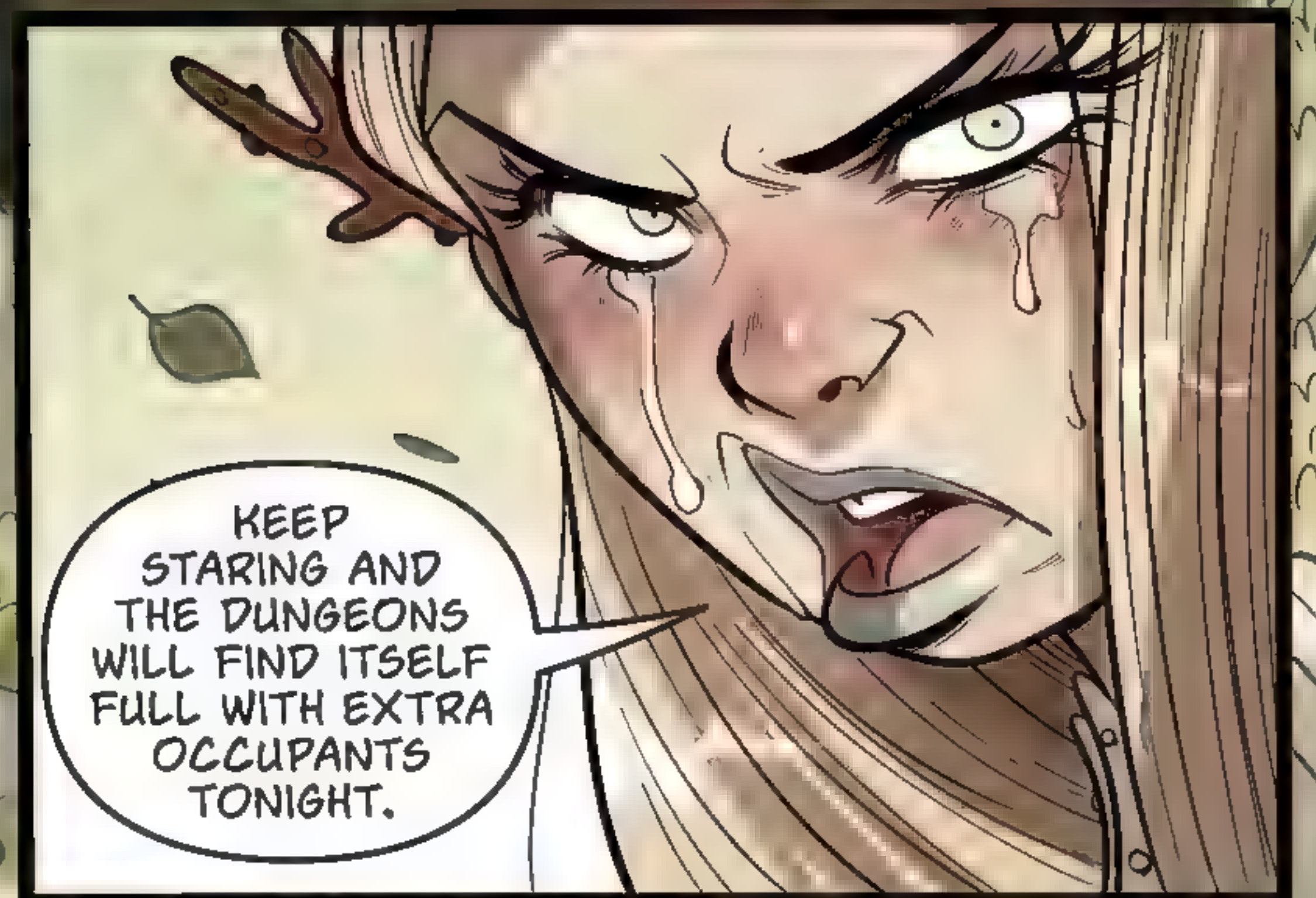
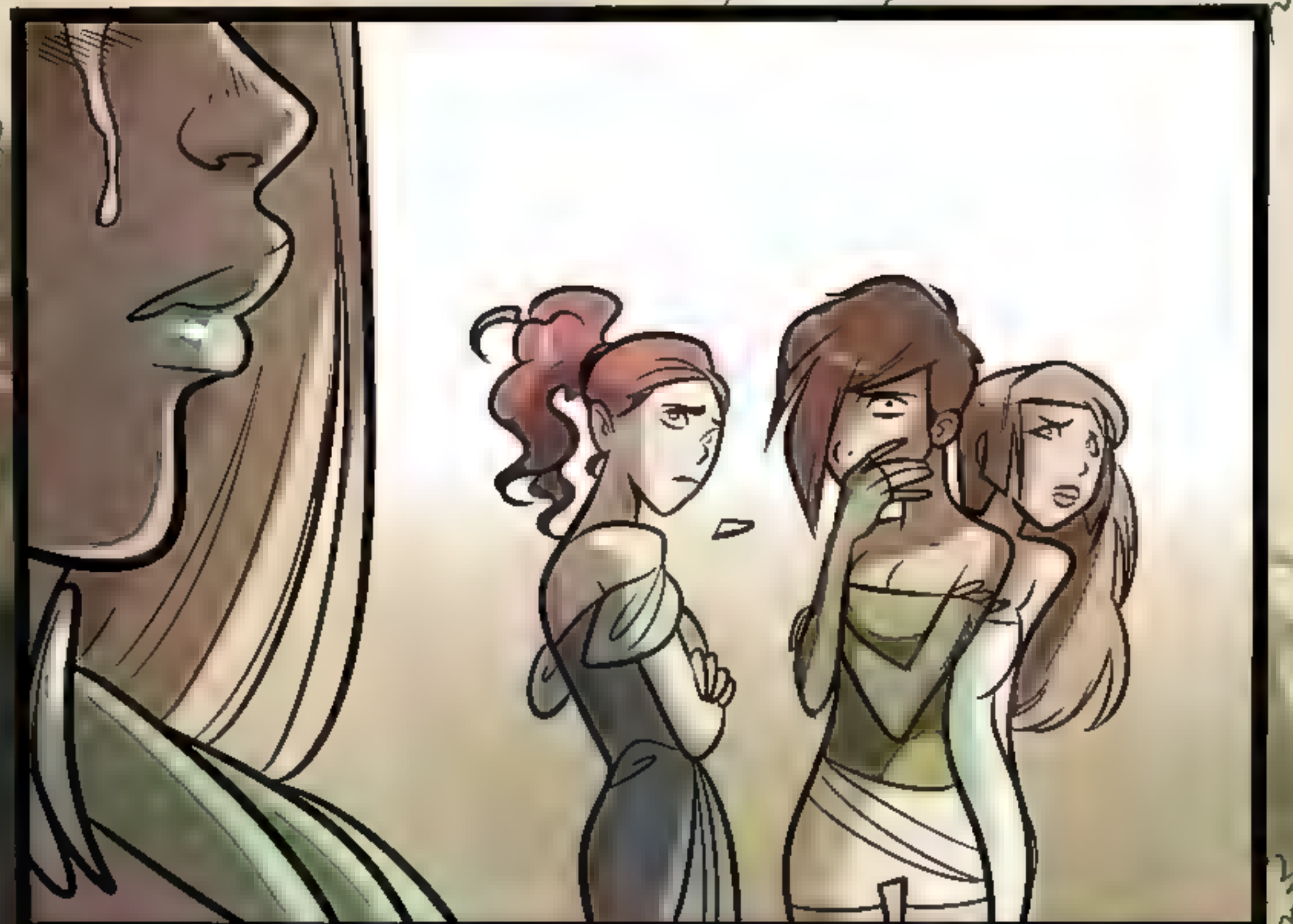
ONE CANNOT
CONTROL THROUGH LOVE,
ILINA. ONE DAY YOU MUST
RULE THIS LAND. AND YOU
AS WELL MUST COME TO
UNDERSTAND...

SOME TIME LATER

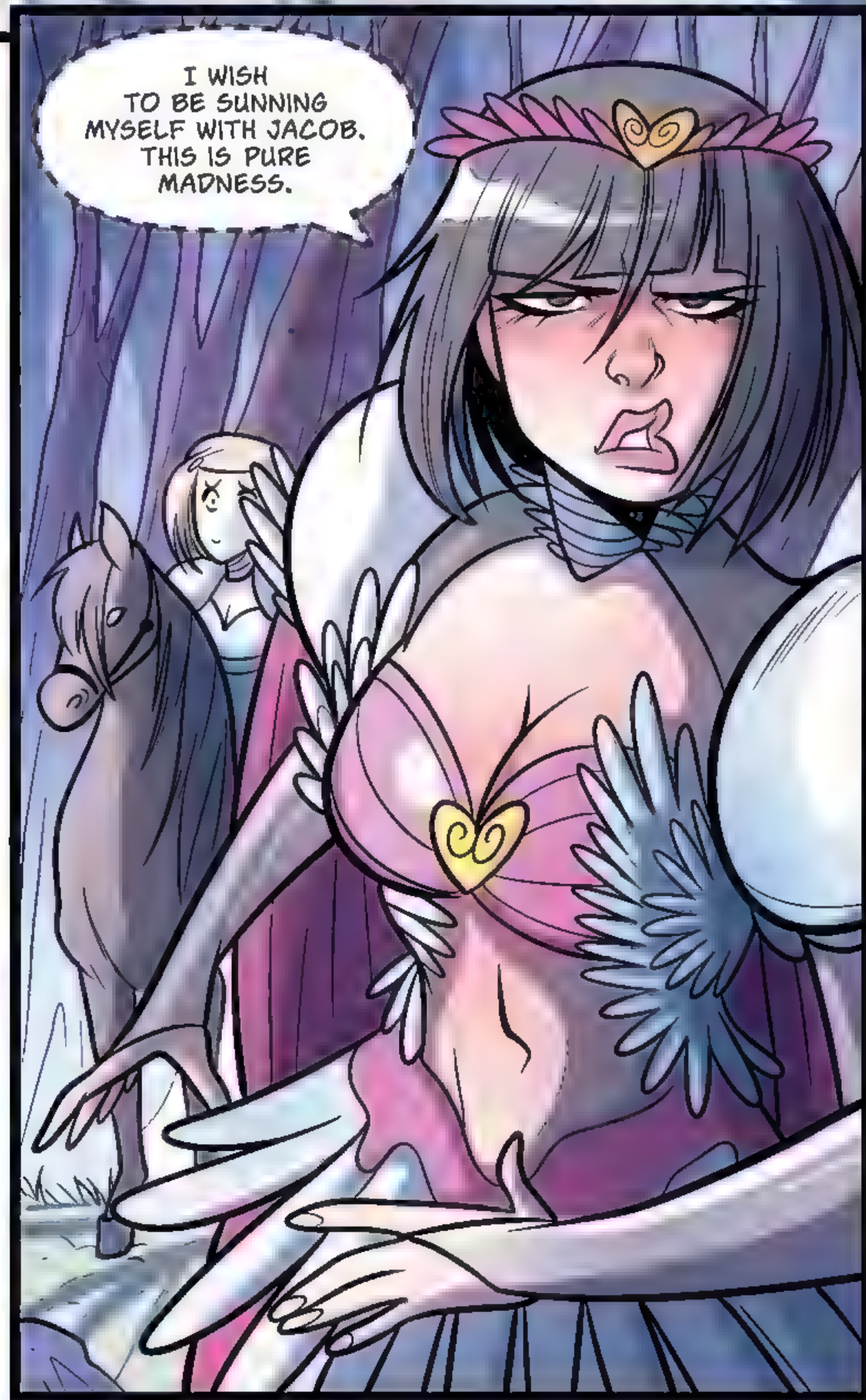
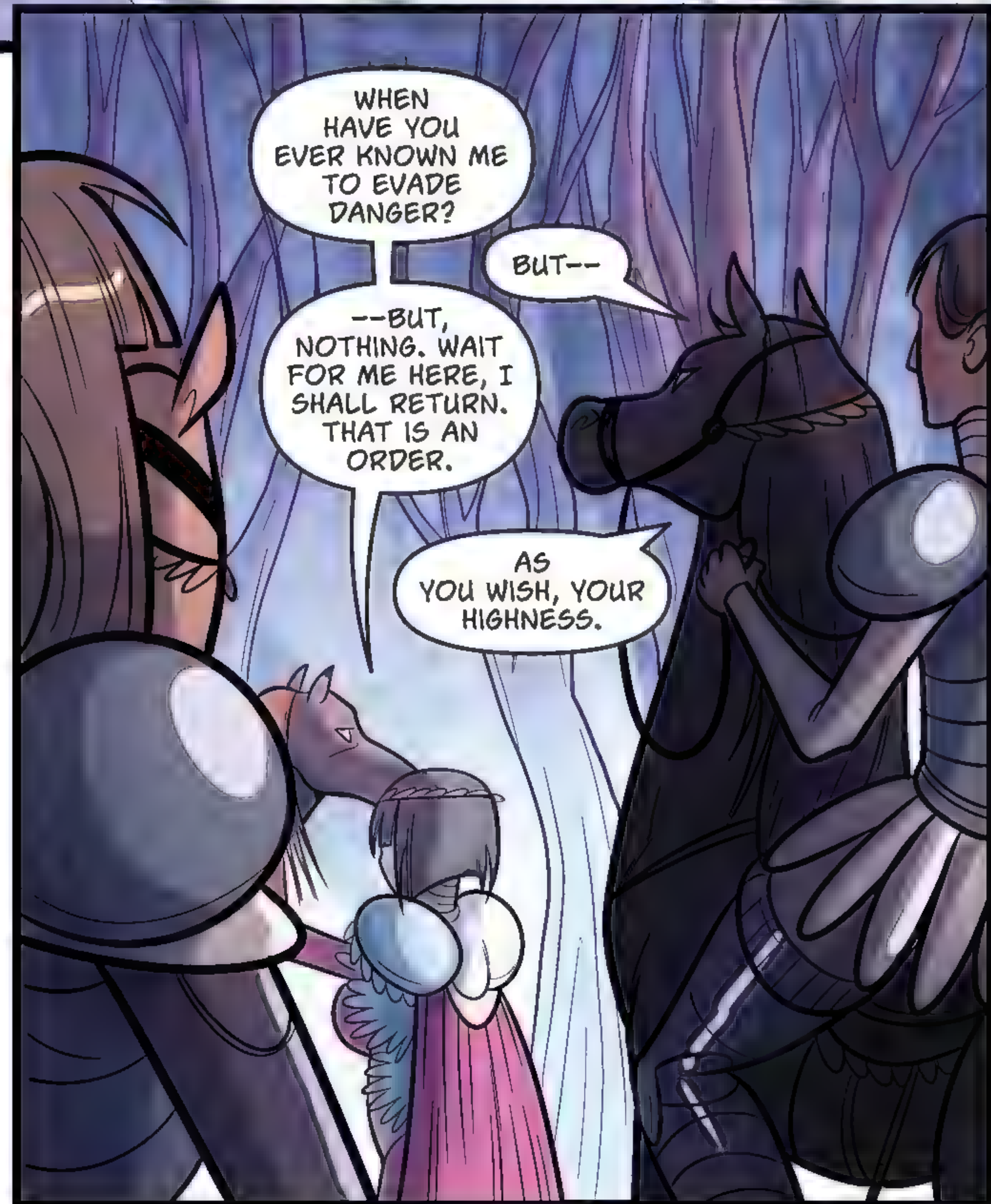
...THAT FEAR
WILL BE YOUR BEST
WEAPON.

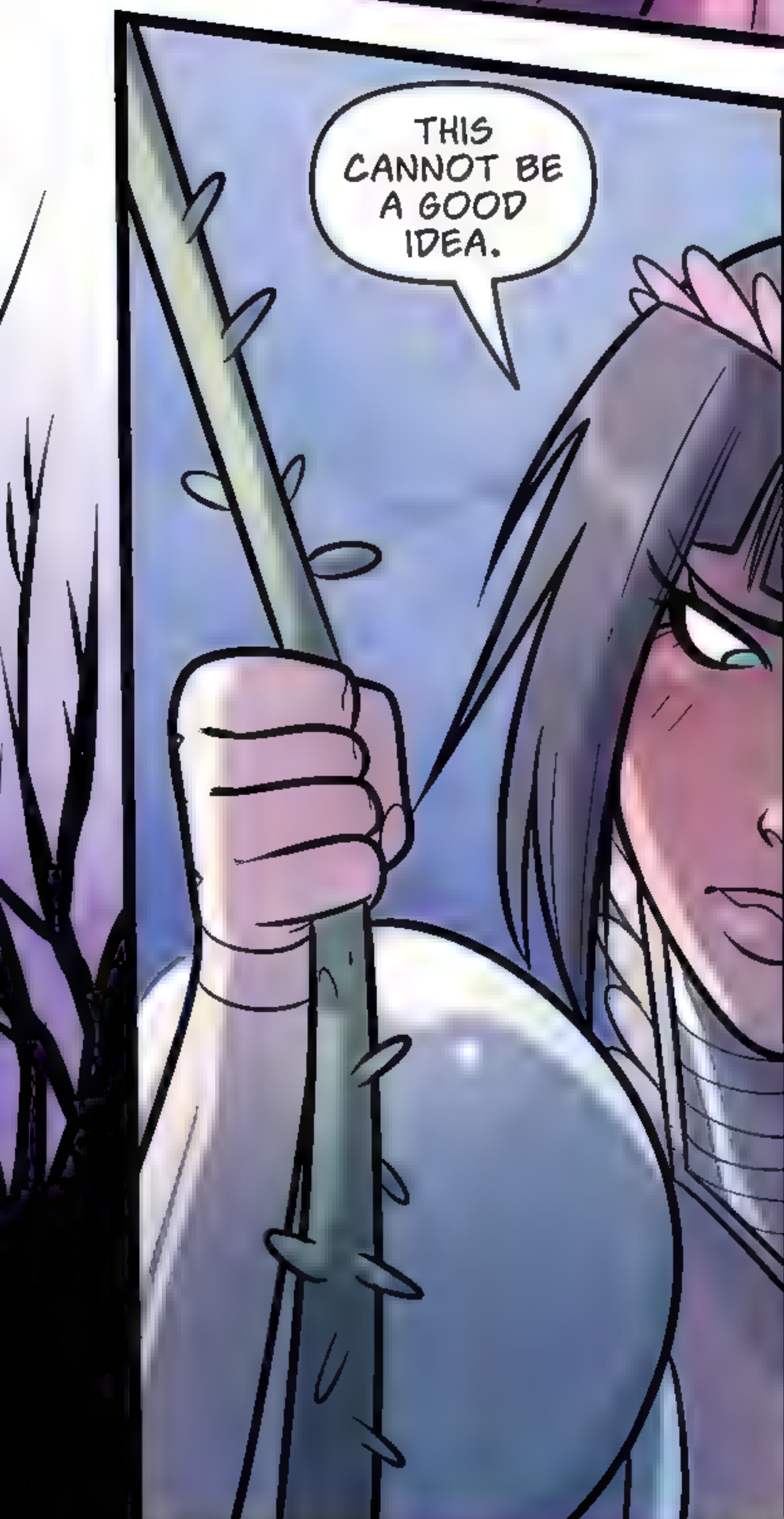
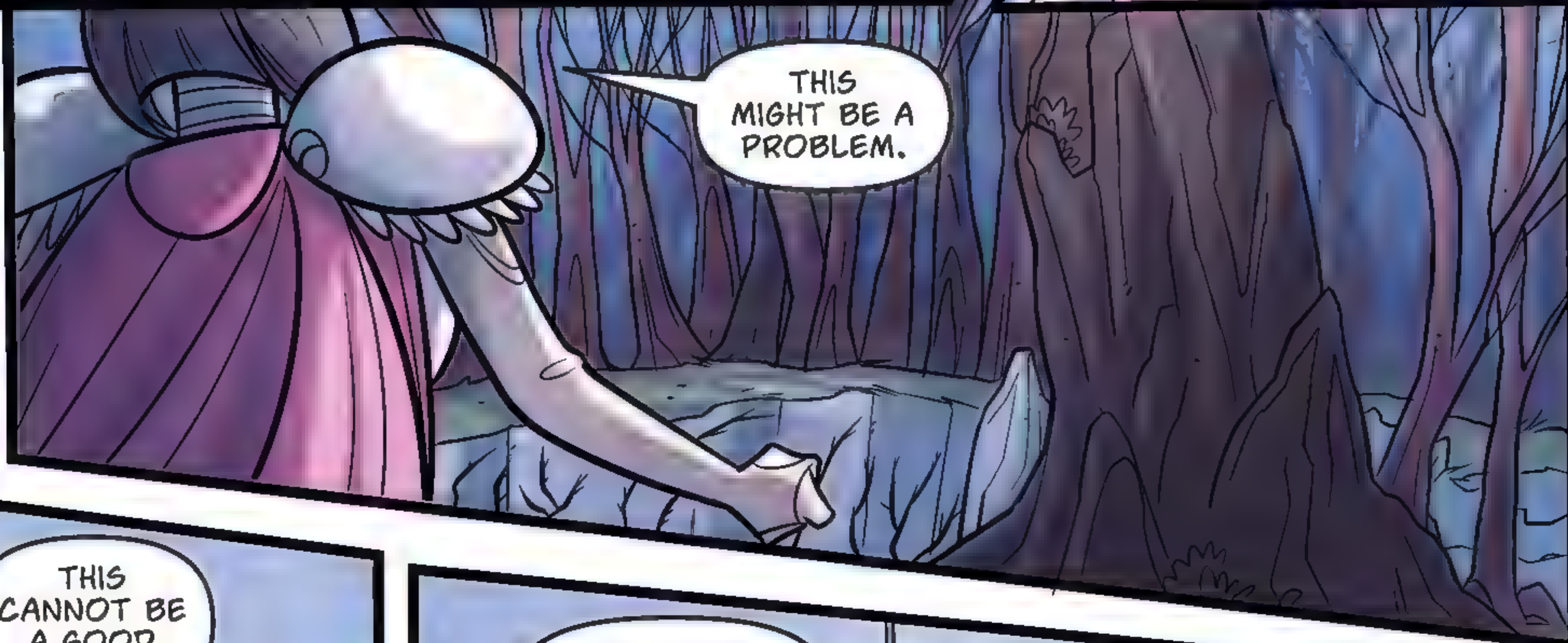
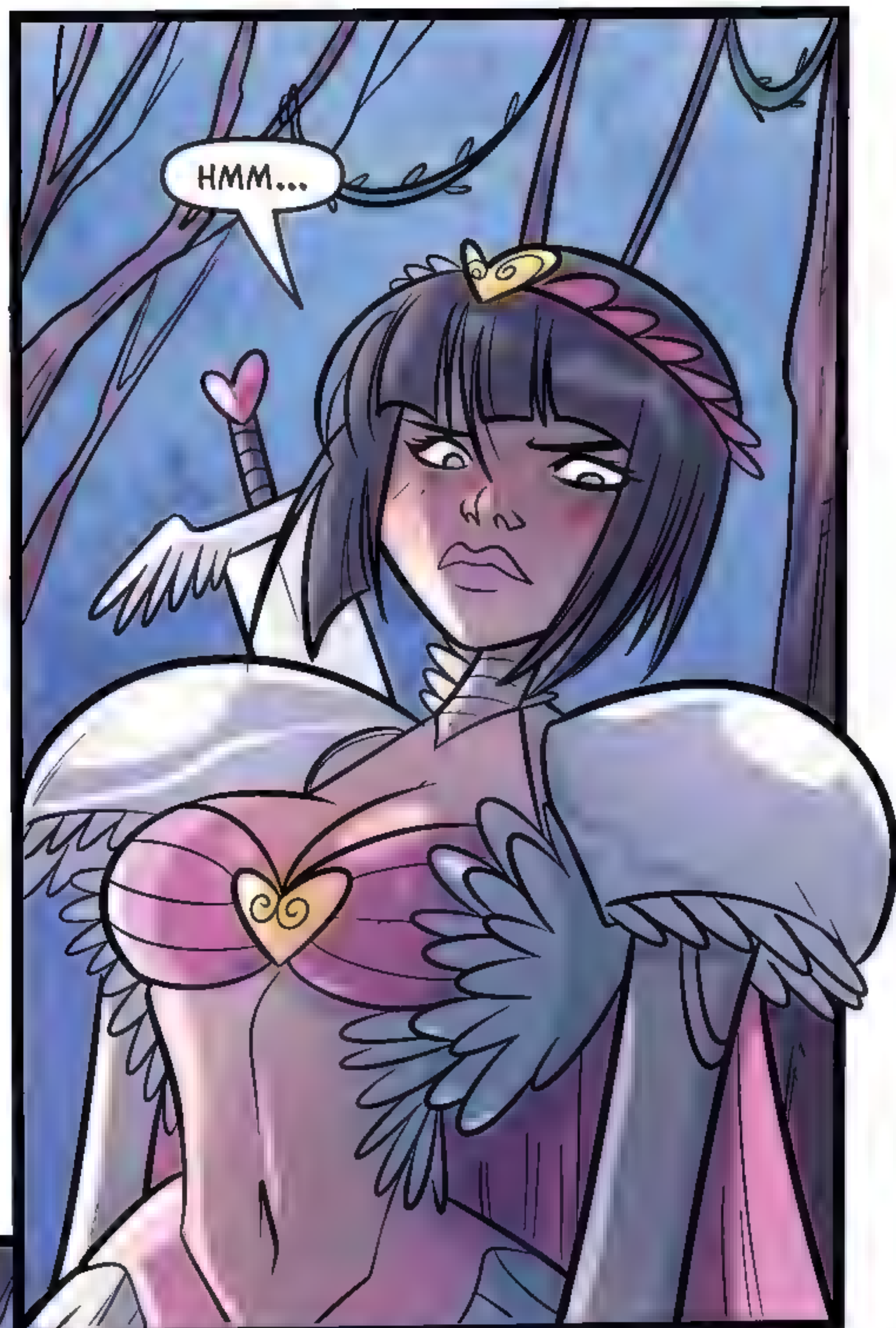


IT IS I THAT IS
AFRAID, MOTHER...
GOODBYE.



KEEP
STARING AND
THE DUNGEONS
WILL FIND ITSELF
FULL WITH EXTRA
OCCUPANTS
TONIGHT.





THEN.

YOU HAVE
QUITE THE BIG
HEAD!

NO,
YOU DO!

DEVONESS,
PLEASE STOP PLAYING
WITH MOTHER'S COLLECTION.
WE MUST BE RESPECTFUL
OF THE DECEASED.

SORRY,
MOMMY.

MOMMY...
WHY DO YOU HAVE
SO MANY?

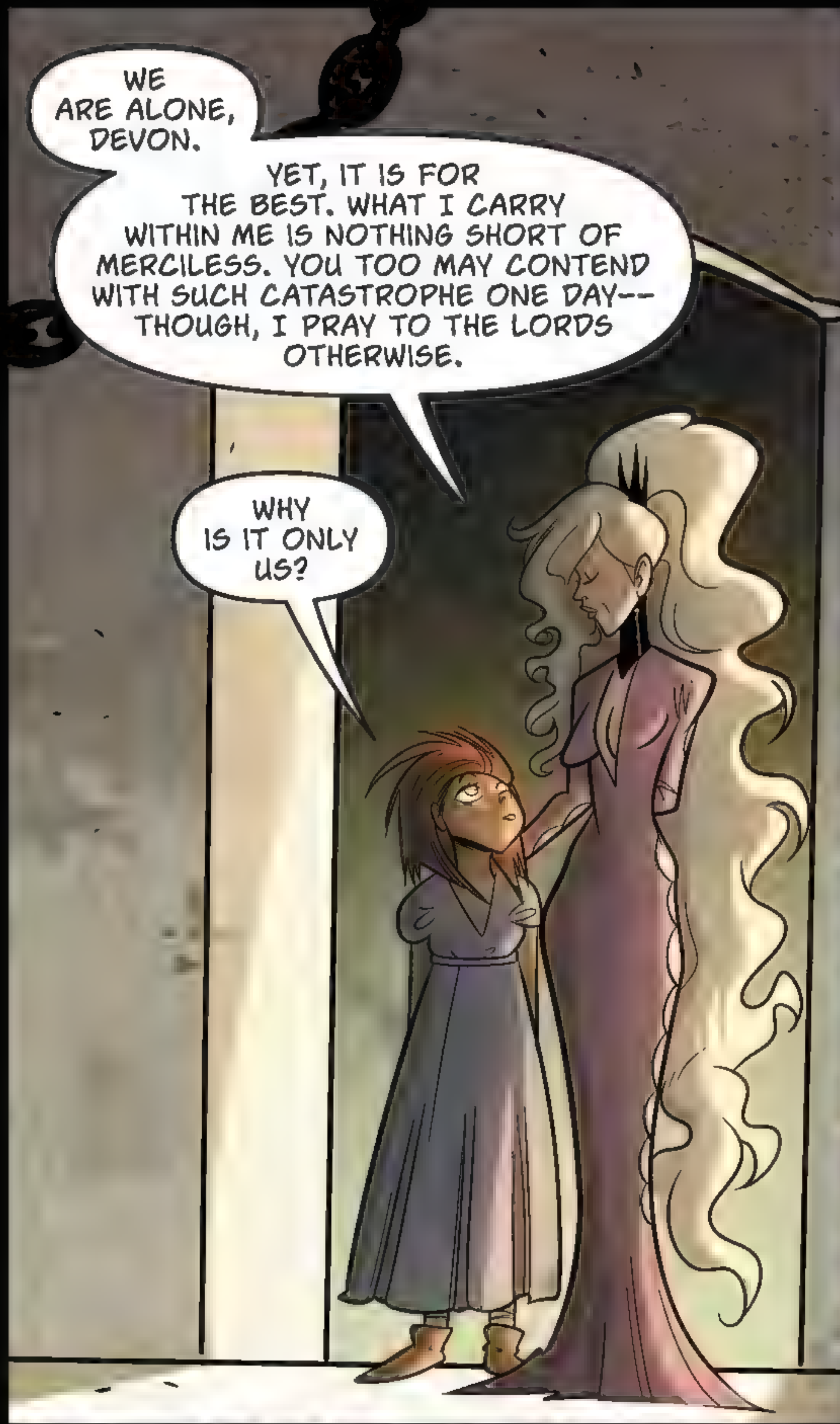
I...UH...
THEY ARE FOR
EXPERIMENTATION, MY
DEAR. MY WORK IS VERY
COMPLICATED, IT--

--BECAUSE
YOU ARE TRYING TO
SAVE THEM?

HOW DO YOU...
WHAT DO YOU KNOW,
YOUNG LADY?

WE
HURT THEM, RIGHT
MOTHER? SOMETHING
INSIDE US?

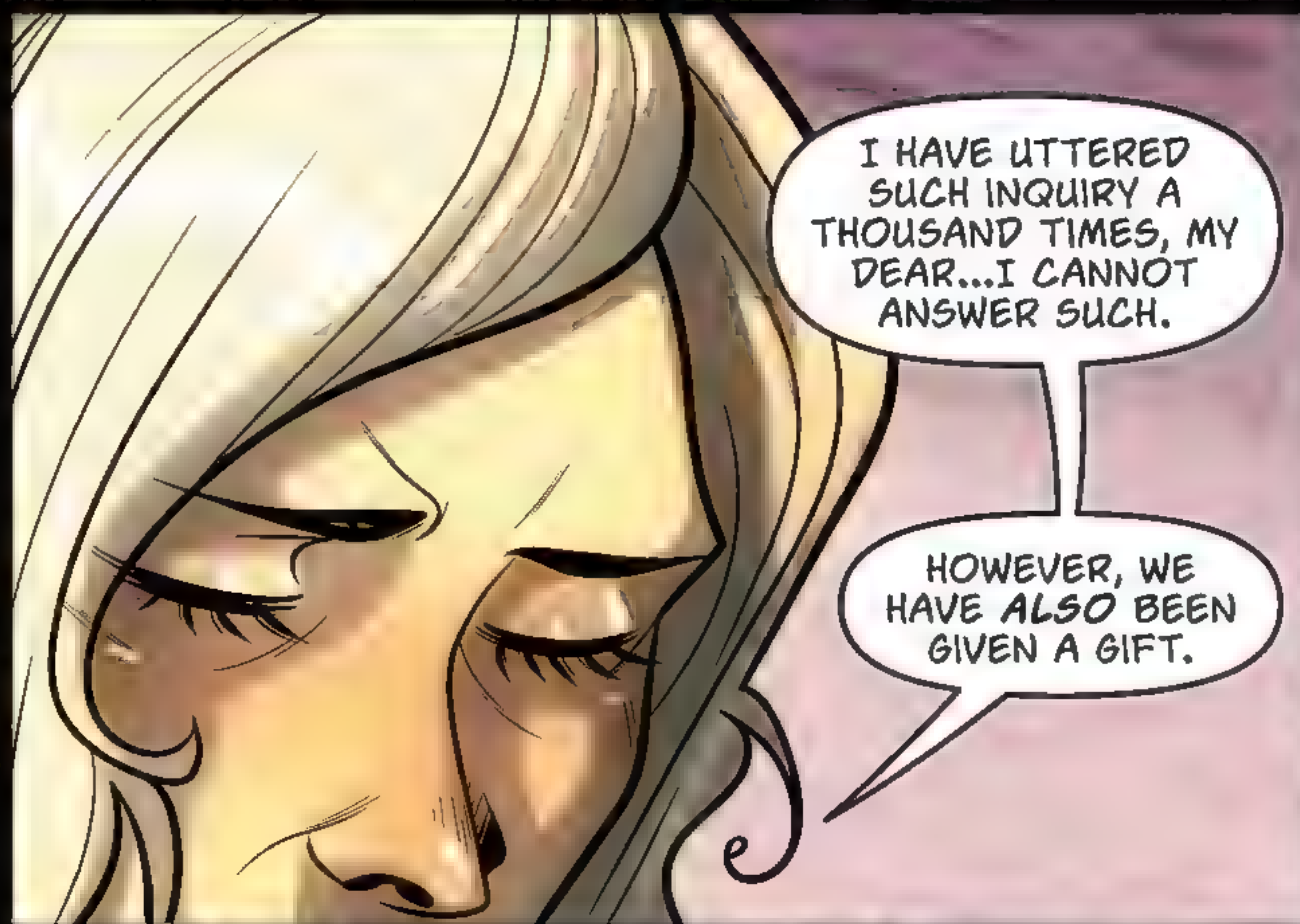
...
YOU ARE
WISE BEYOND
YOUR SEASONS.
DO YOU KNOW
THIS, YOUNG
LADY?



WE
ARE ALONE,
DEVON.

YET, IT IS FOR
THE BEST. WHAT I CARRY
WITHIN ME IS NOTHING SHORT OF
MERCILESS. YOU TOO MAY CONTEND
WITH SUCH CATASTROPHE ONE DAY--
THOUGH, I PRAY TO THE LORDS
OTHERWISE.

WHY
IS IT ONLY
US?



I HAVE UTTERED
SUCH INQUIRY A
THOUSAND TIMES, MY
DEAR...I CANNOT
ANSWER SUCH.

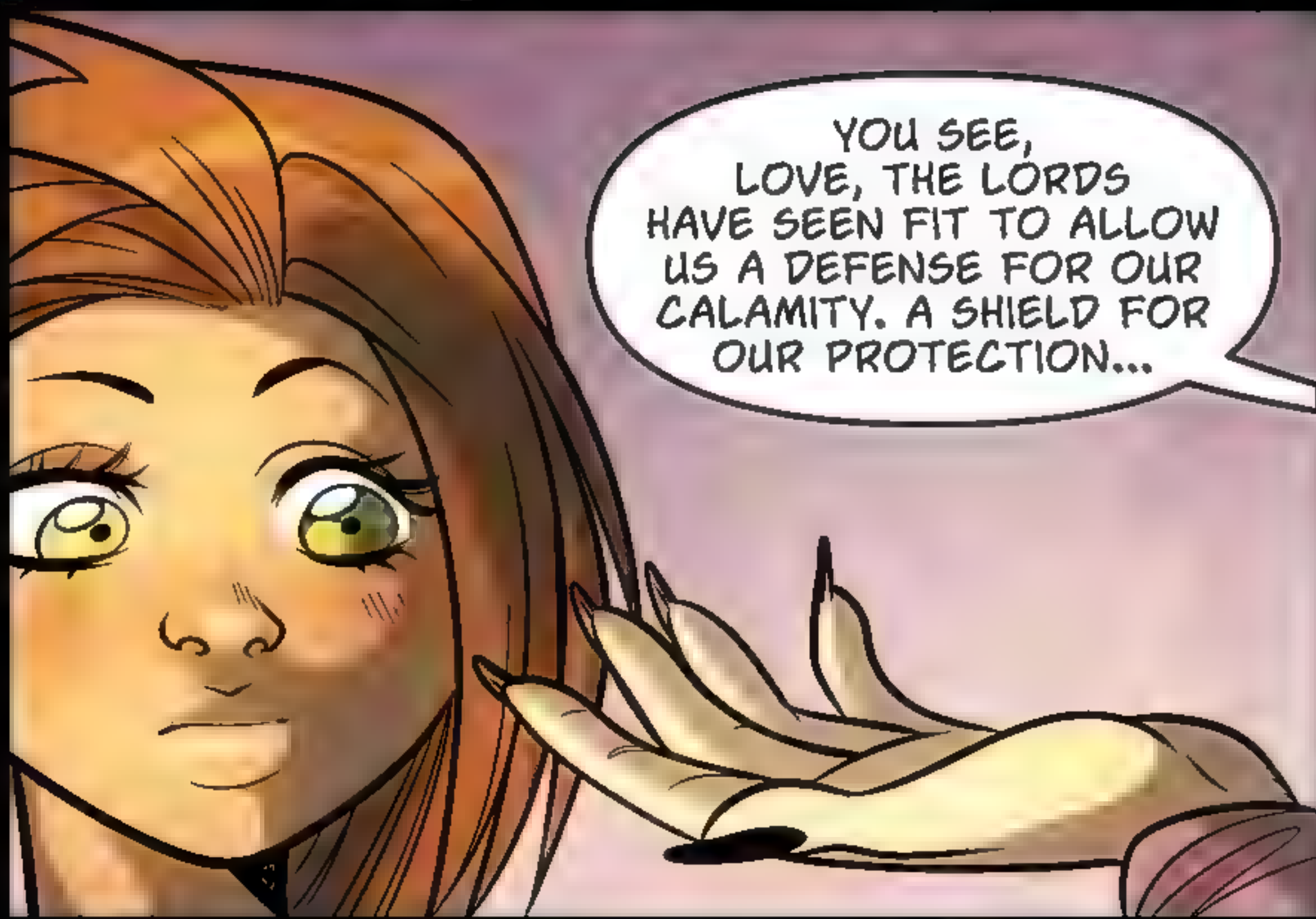
HOWEVER, WE
HAVE ALSO BEEN
GIVEN A GIFT.



I LOVE
GIFTS!

I KNOW YOU
DO, AND THIS ONE
IS BETTER THAN ANY
YOU SHALL EVER
RECEIVE.

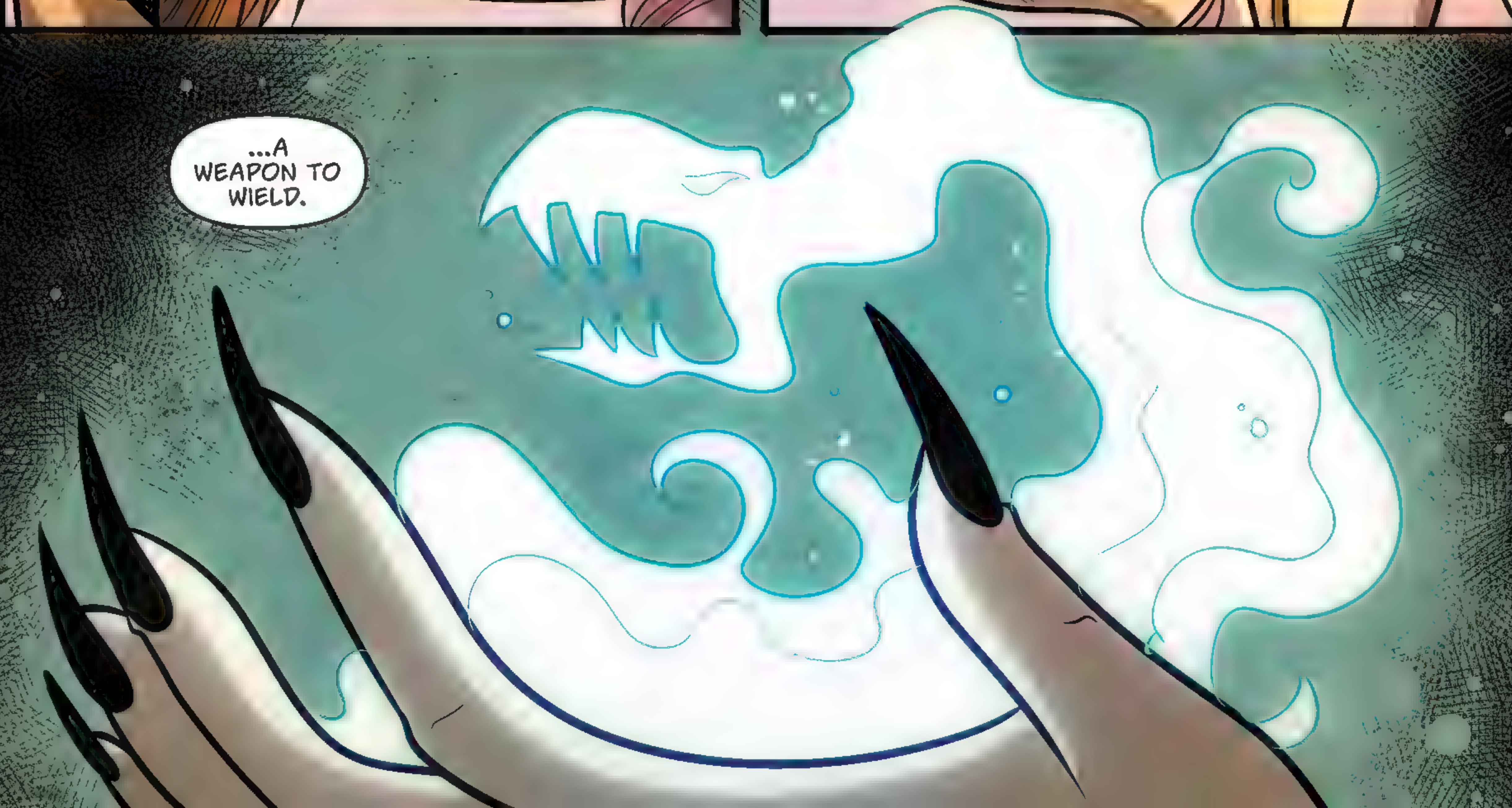
WHAT IS IT,
MOTHER?!



YOU SEE,
LOVE, THE LORDS
HAVE SEEN FIT TO ALLOW
US A DEFENSE FOR OUR
CALAMITY. A SHIELD FOR
OUR PROTECTION...



...A
BLESSING TO
BEHOLD...



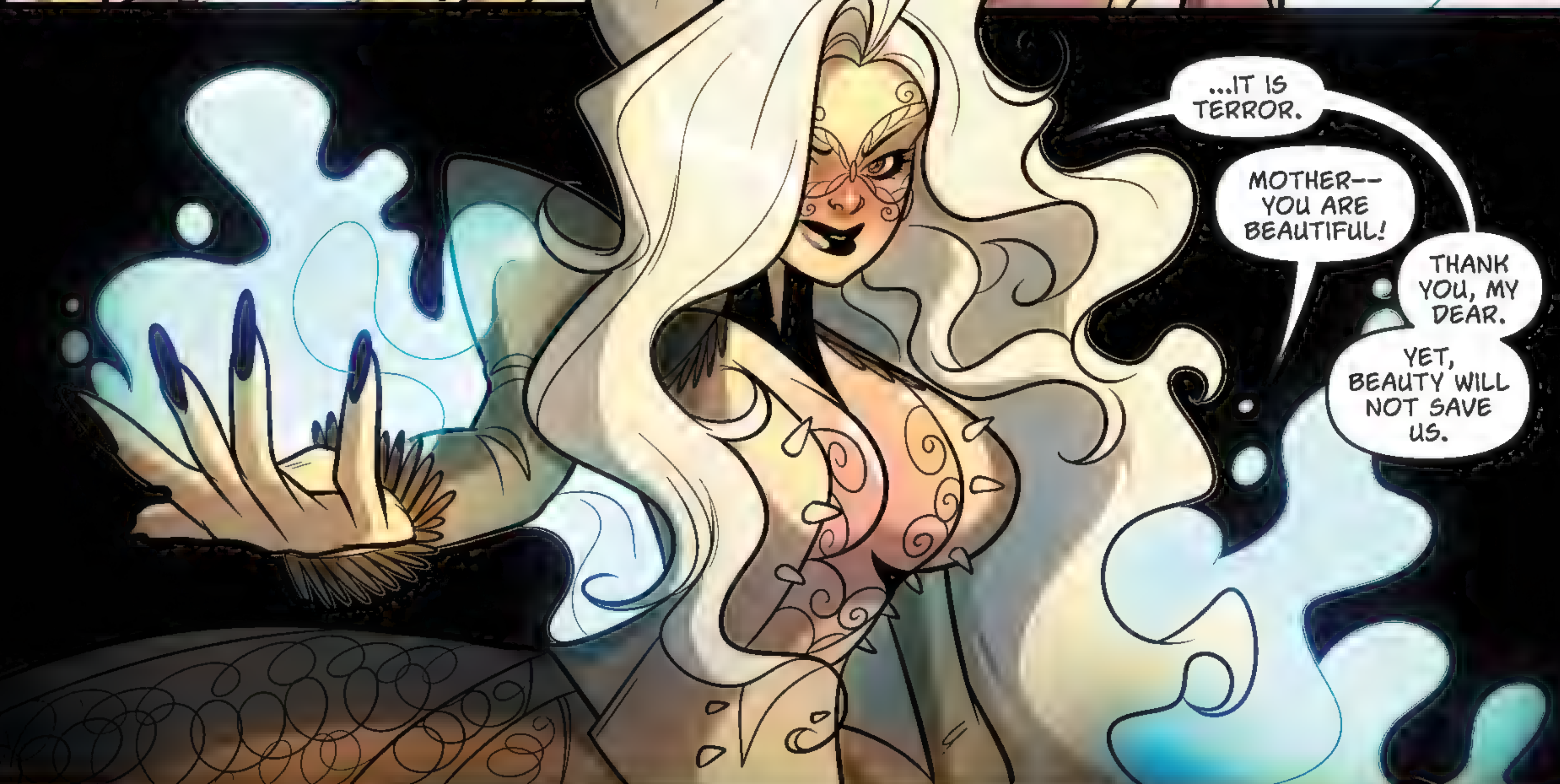
...A
WEAPON TO
WIELD.



DO NOT BE FRIGHTENED. IT WILL NOT HURT YOU.



YOU SEE, OUR GREATEST ASSET IS NOT OUR POWER TO BRING DEATH, AND DESPAIR...NO...

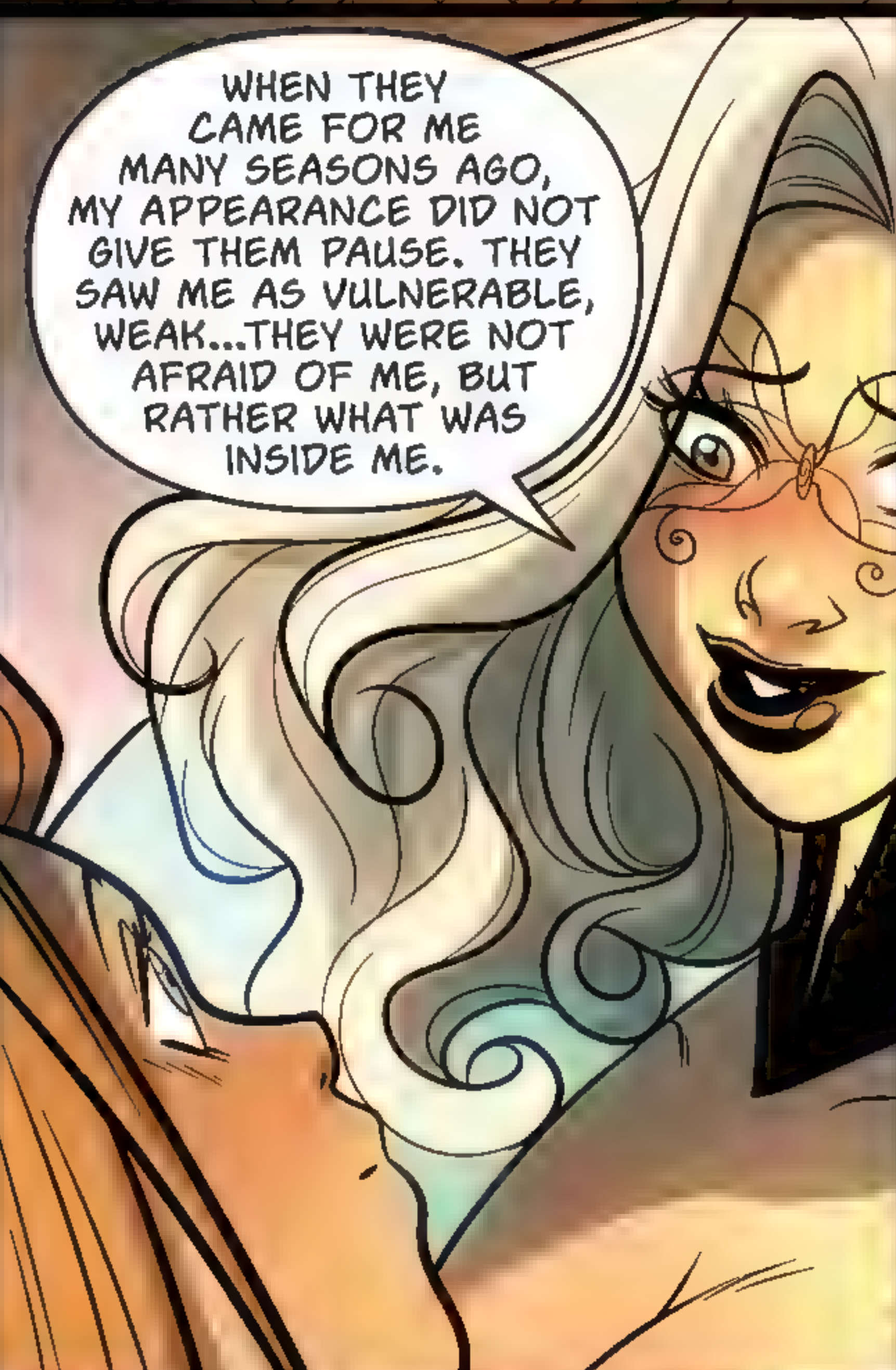


...IT IS TERROR.

MOTHER-- YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL!

THANK YOU, MY DEAR.

YET, BEAUTY WILL NOT SAVE US.



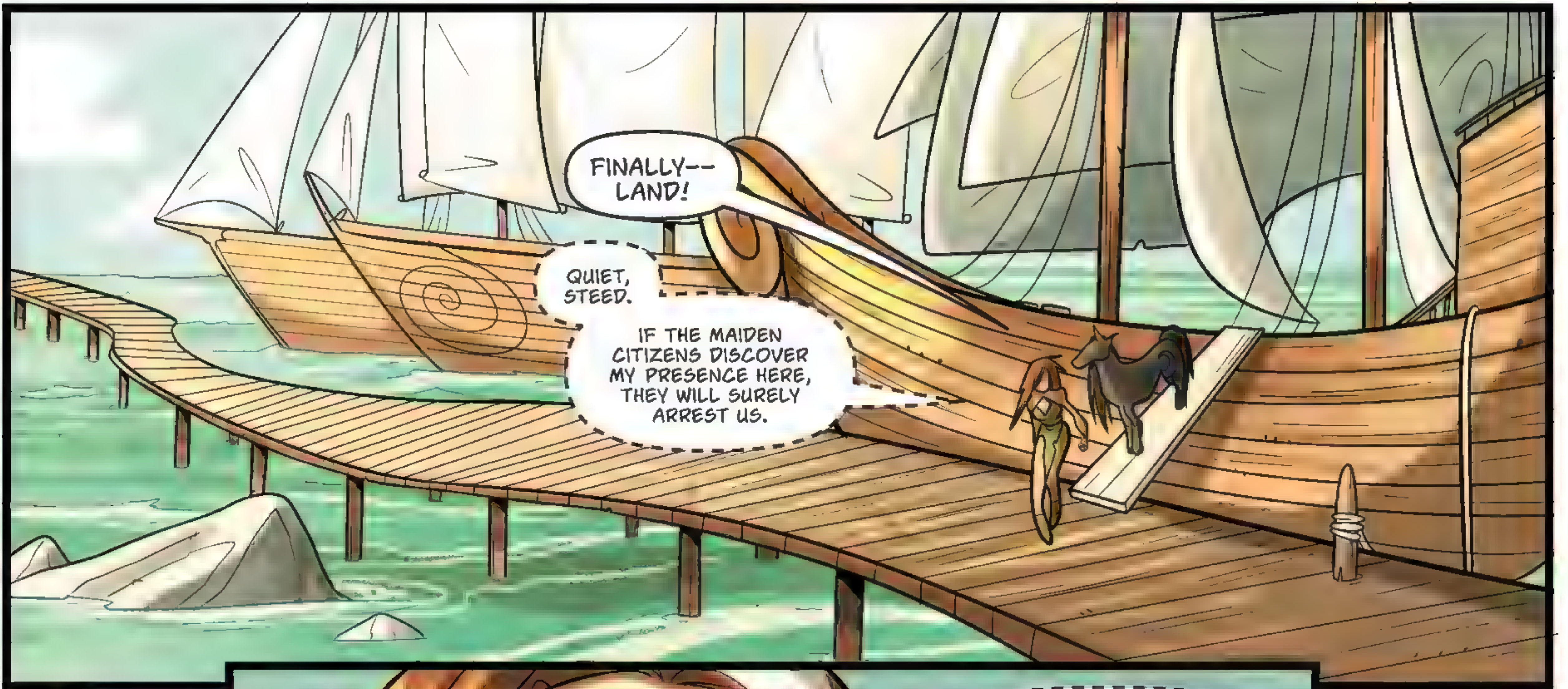
WHEN THEY CAME FOR ME MANY SEASONS AGO, MY APPEARANCE DID NOT GIVE THEM PAUSE. THEY SAW ME AS VULNERABLE, WEAK...THEY WERE NOT AFRAID OF ME, BUT RATHER WHAT WAS INSIDE ME.



THAT IS WHY WE CAN NEVER SHOW THEM OUR TRUE BEAUTY, OUR TRUE FORM...



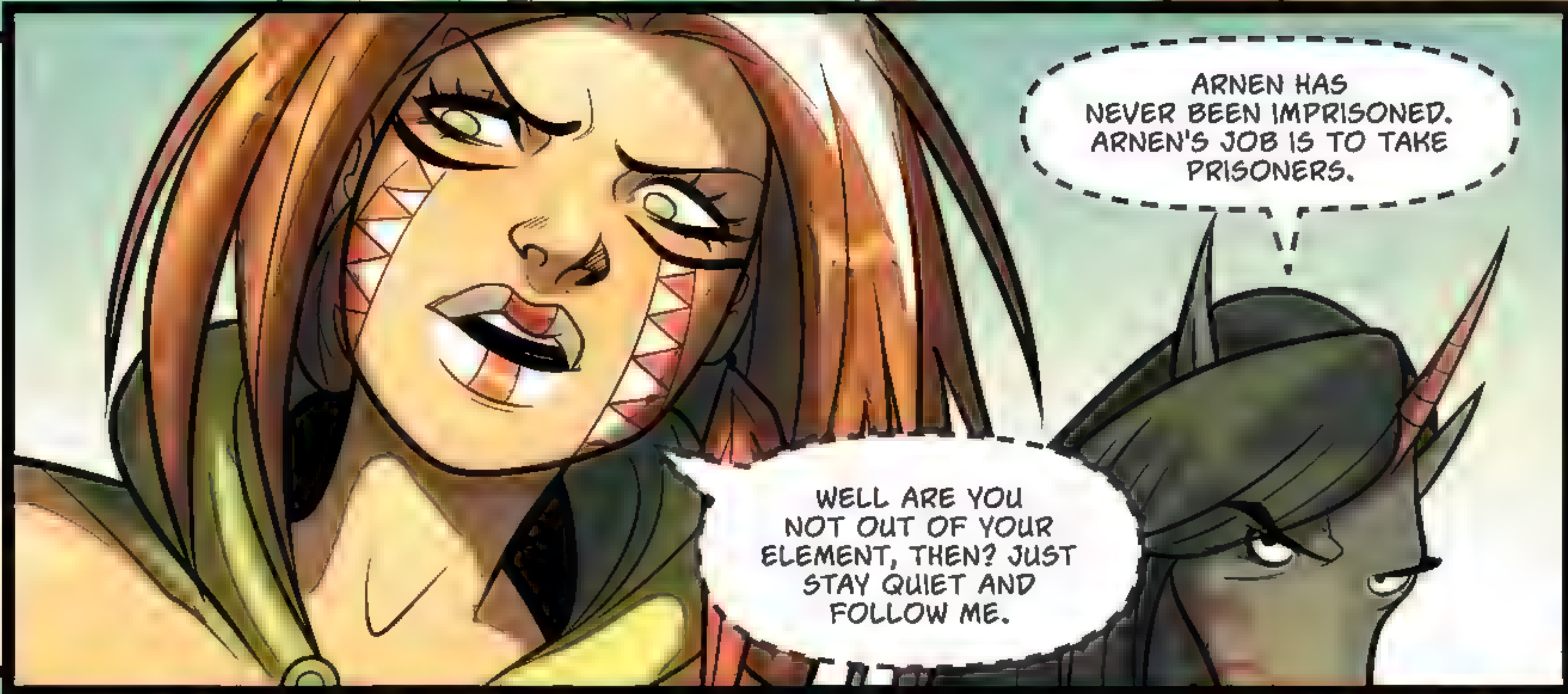
...NO, WE MUST FEED THEIR FRIGHTFUL IMAGINATION AND PROTECT OURSELVES.



FINALLY--
LAND!

QUIET,
STEED.

IF THE MAIDEN
CITIZENS DISCOVER
MY PRESENCE HERE,
THEY WILL SURELY
ARREST US.



ARNEN HAS
NEVER BEEN IMPRISONED.
ARNEN'S JOB IS TO TAKE
PRISONERS.

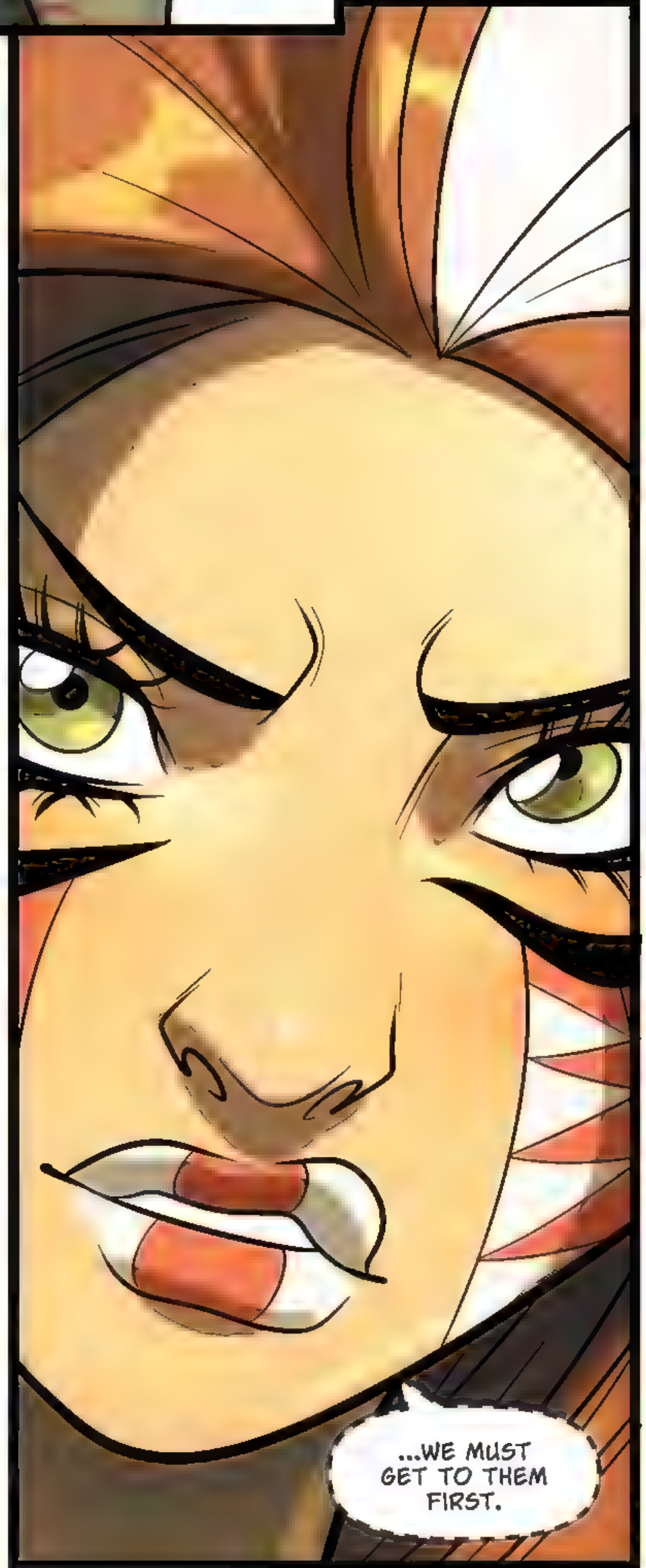
WELL ARE YOU
NOT OUT OF YOUR
ELEMENT, THEN? JUST
STAY QUIET AND
FOLLOW ME.



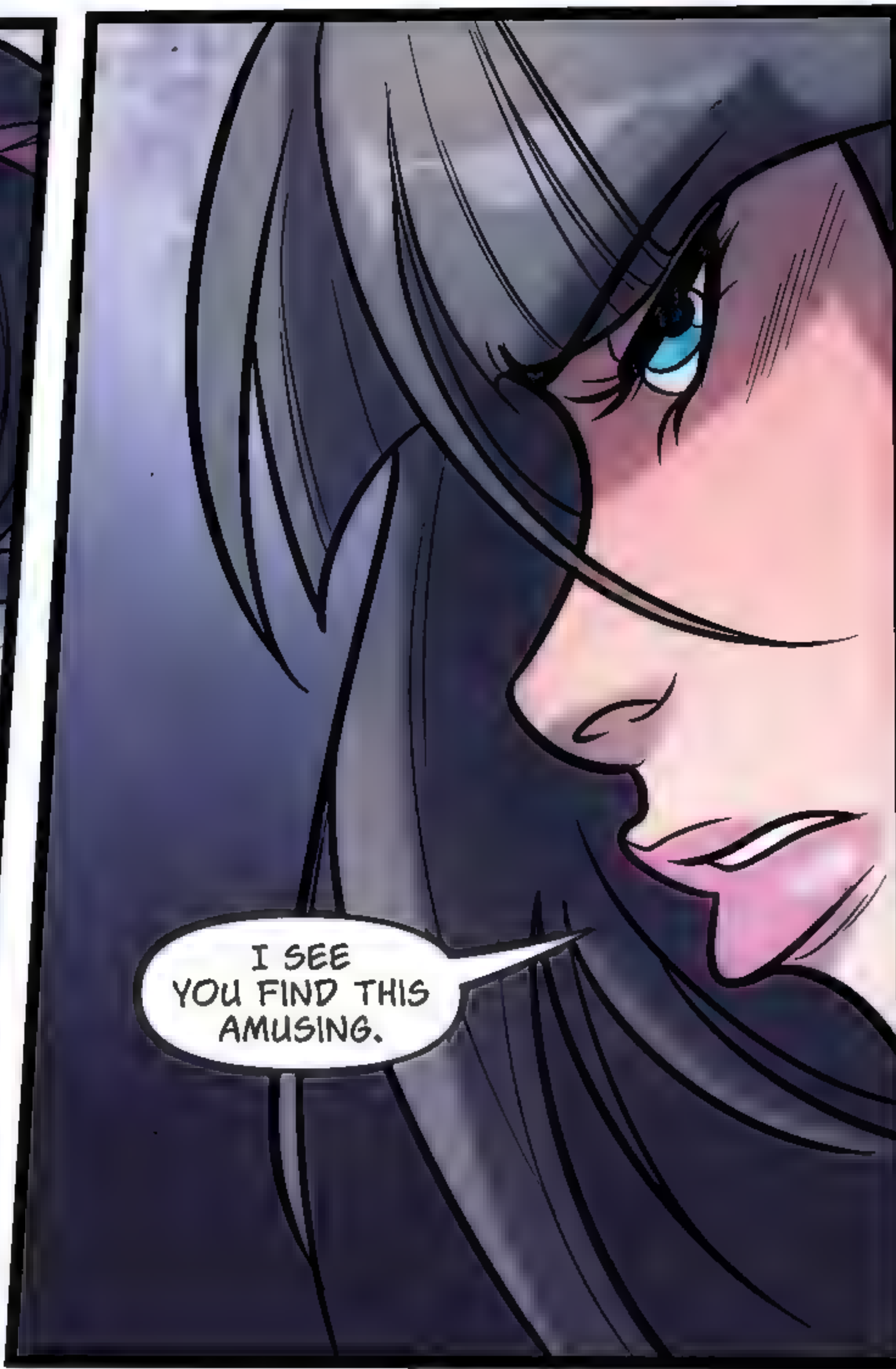
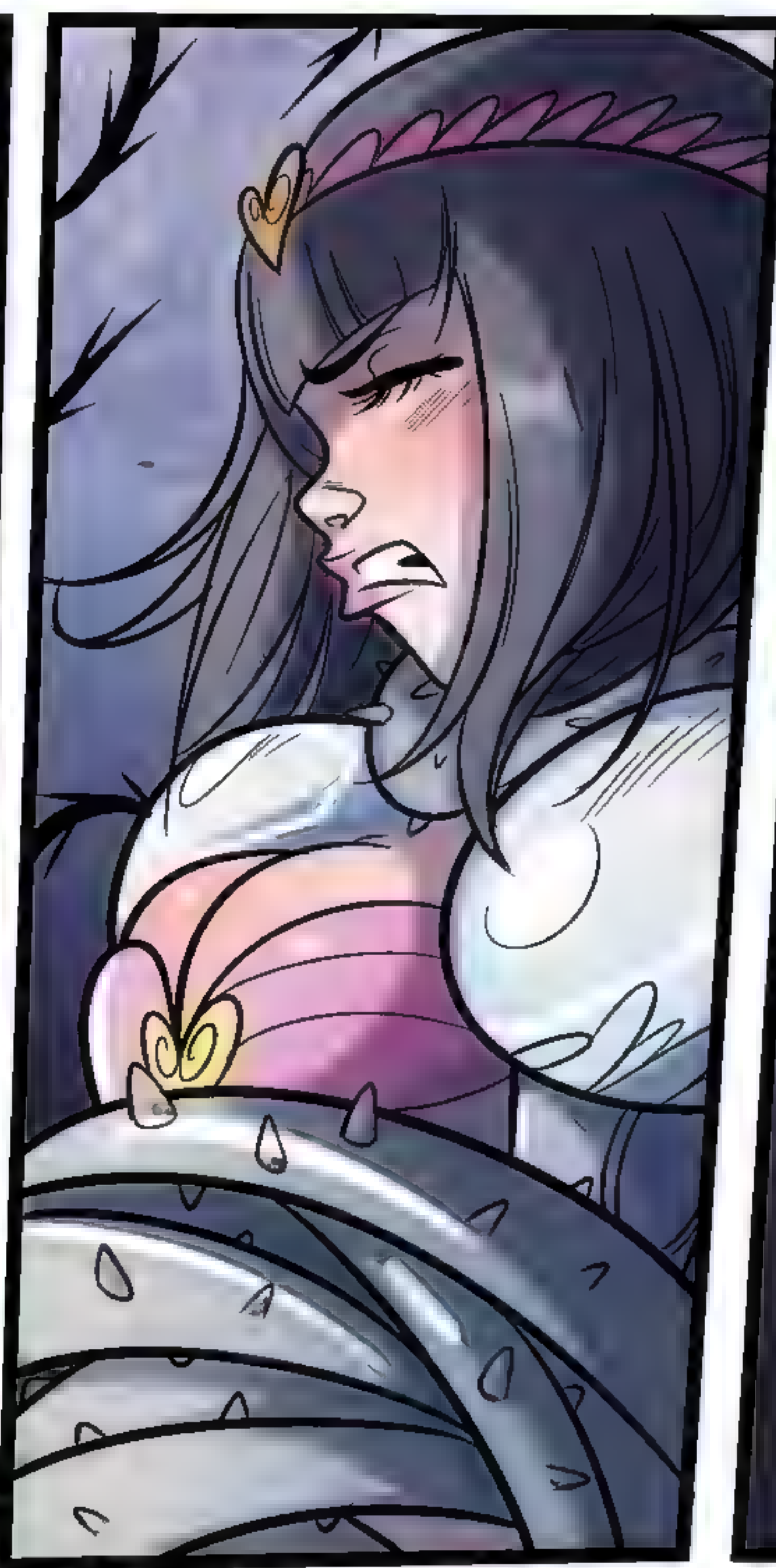
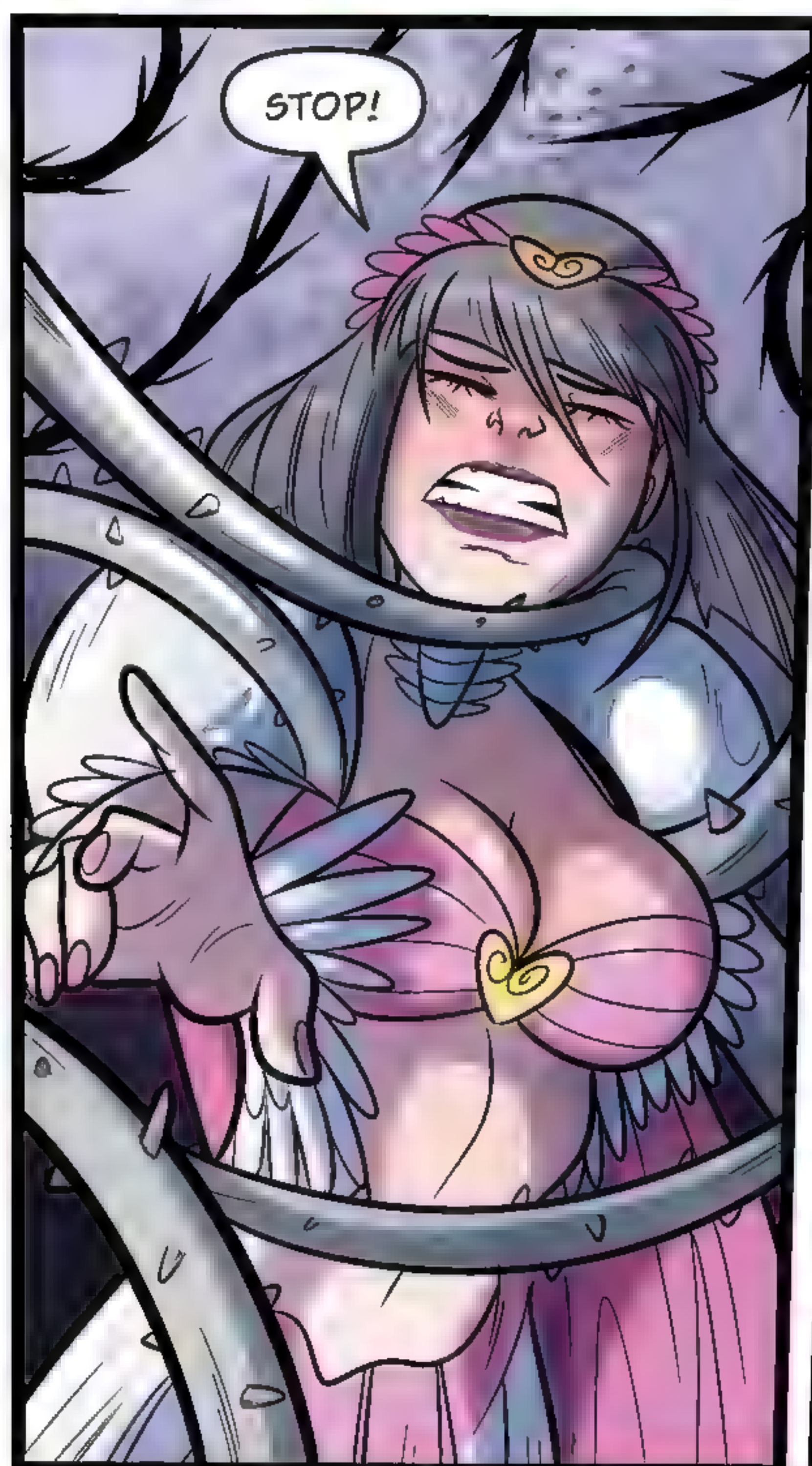
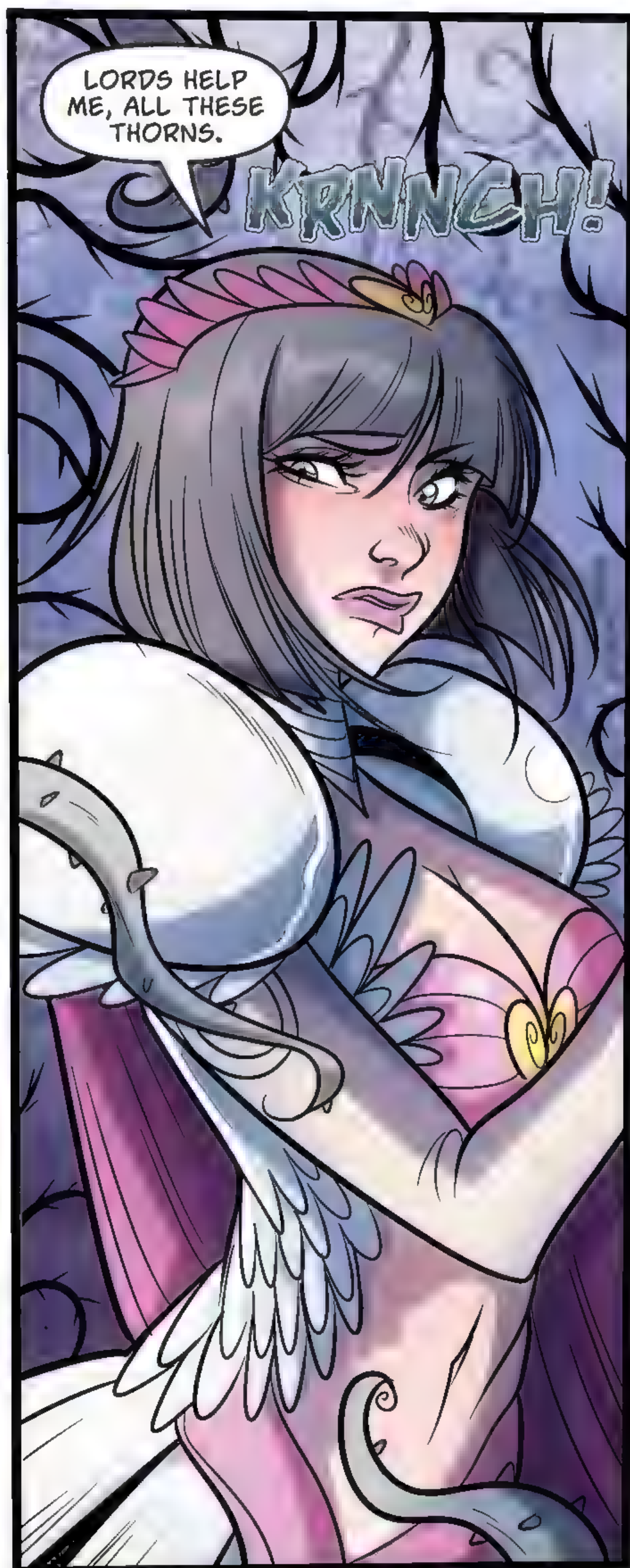
THERE IS
NO NEED FOR
RUDENESS.

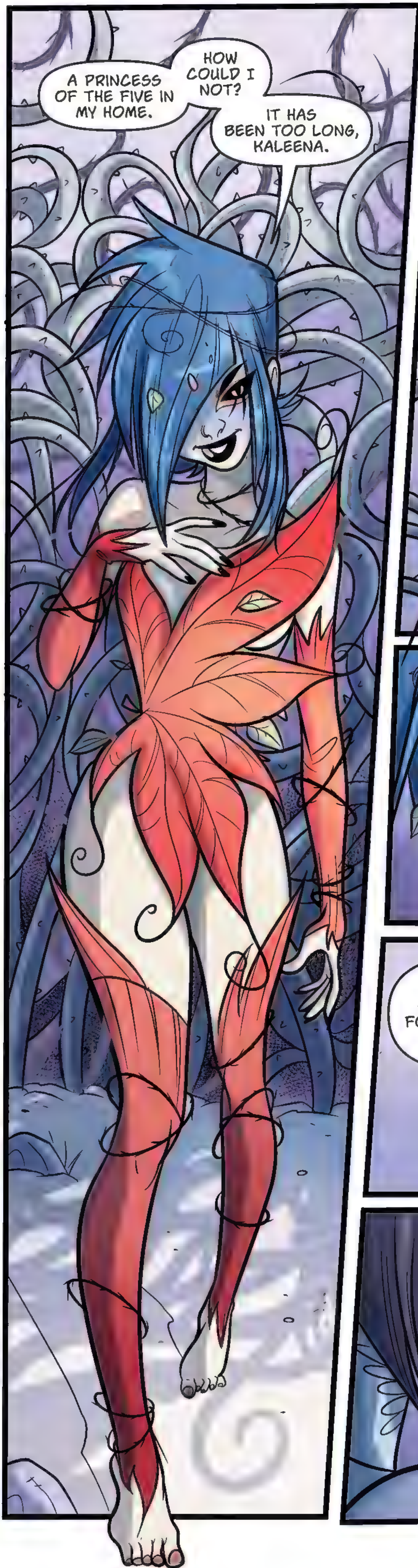


MY APPROACH
IS NOT DISCOURTEOUS,
ONLY SWIFT IN NATURE.
DO NOT BE FOOLED--IF
THE LADY KIMBERLEIN OR
HER SOLDIERS DISCOVER
US, WE WILL BE PUT TO
DEATH FOR TRESPASSING
HER BORDERS...



...WE MUST
GET TO THEM
FIRST.

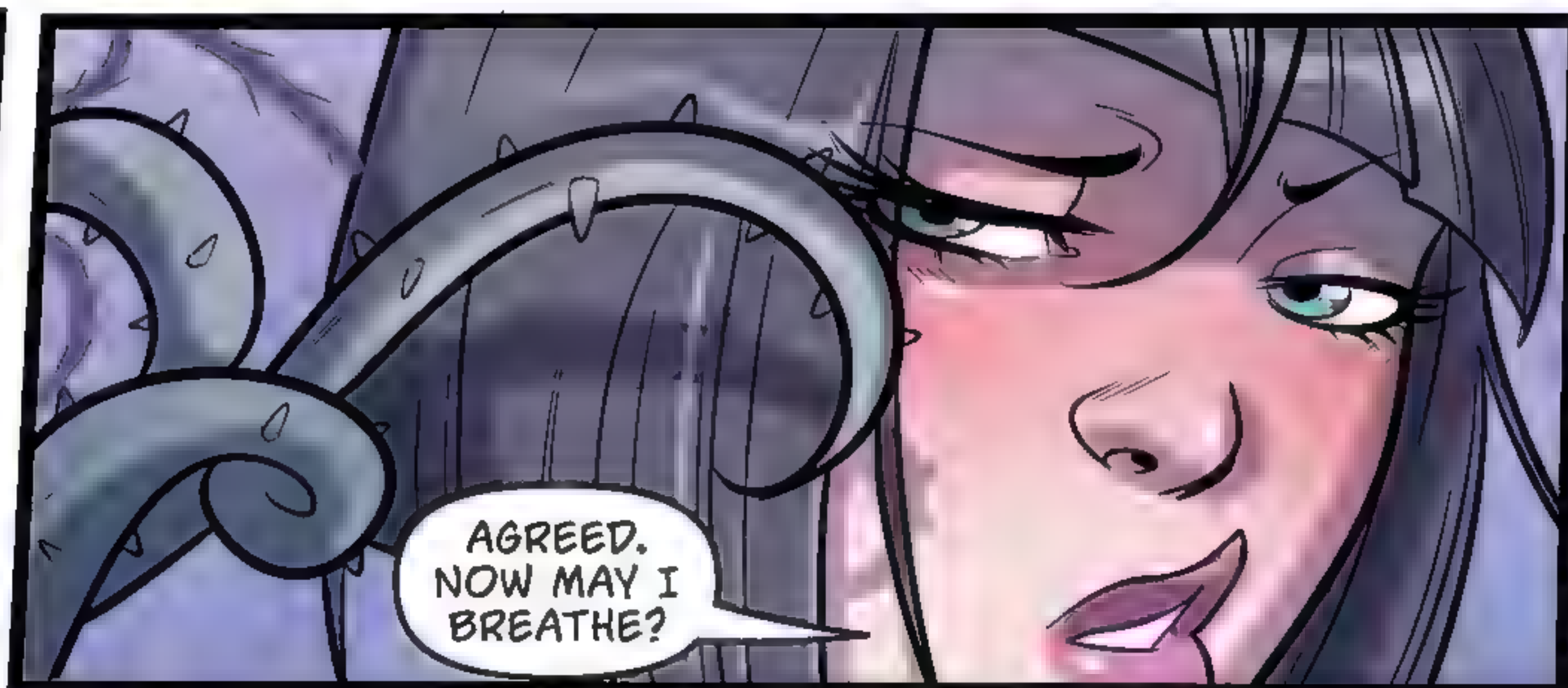




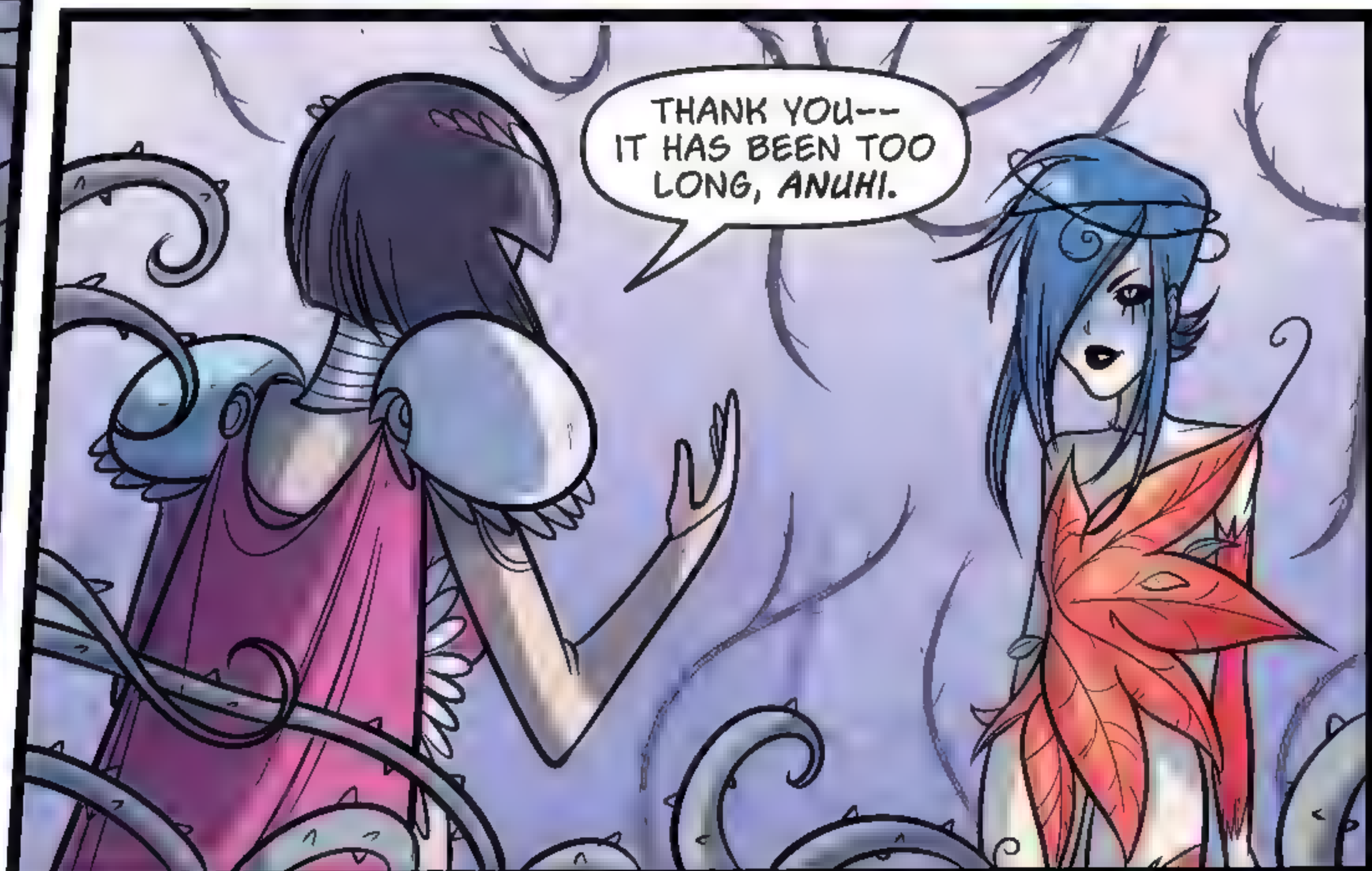
A PRINCESS
OF THE FIVE IN
MY HOME.

HOW
COULD I
NOT?

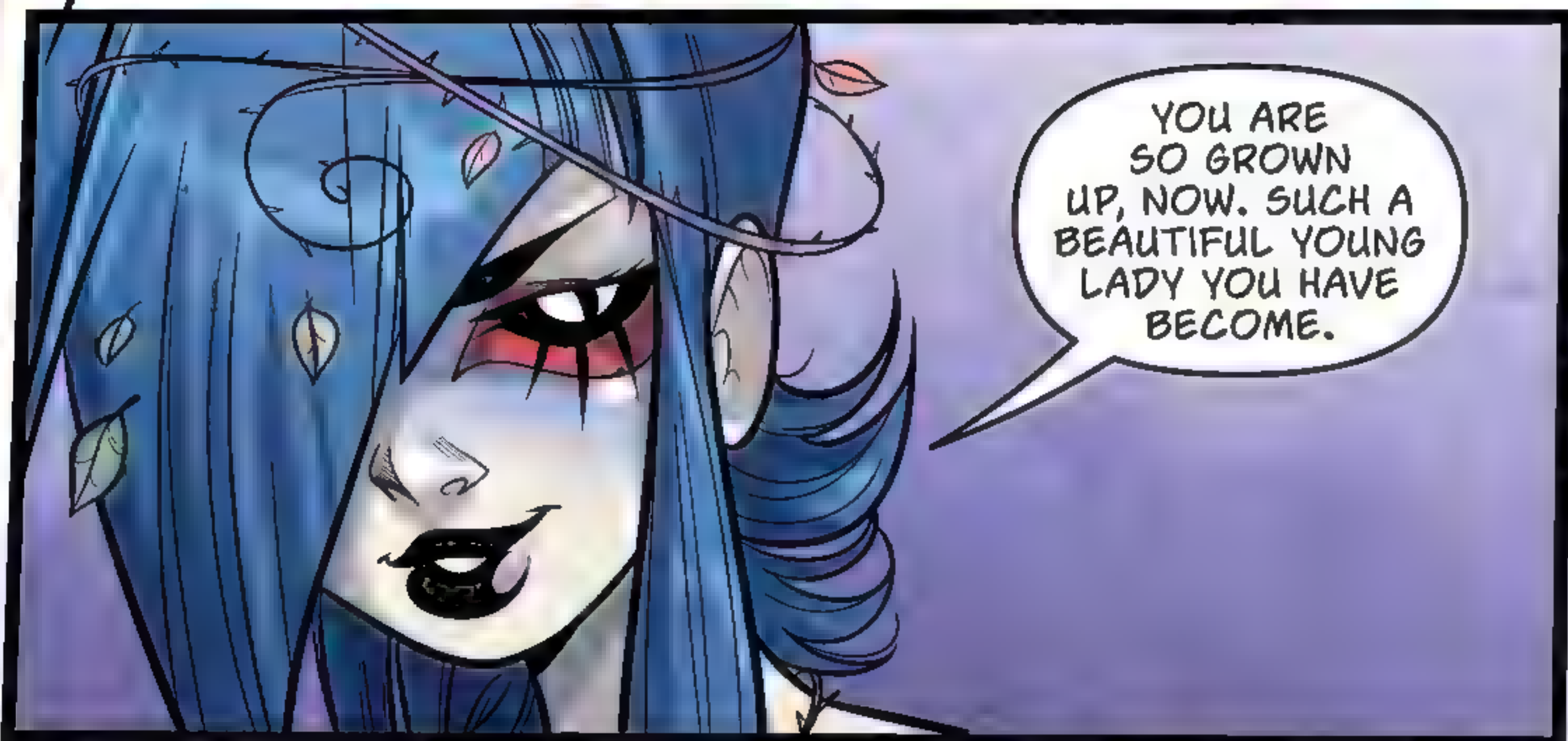
IT HAS
BEEN TOO LONG,
KALEENA.



AGREED.
NOW MAY I
BREATHE?



THANK YOU---
IT HAS BEEN TOO
LONG, ANUHI.



YOU ARE
SO GROWN
UP, NOW. SUCH A
BEAUTIFUL YOUNG
LADY YOU HAVE
BECOME.



THANK
YOU. BUT, I
HAVE NOT COME
FOR COMPLIMENTS.
I SEEK YOUR
WISDOM.

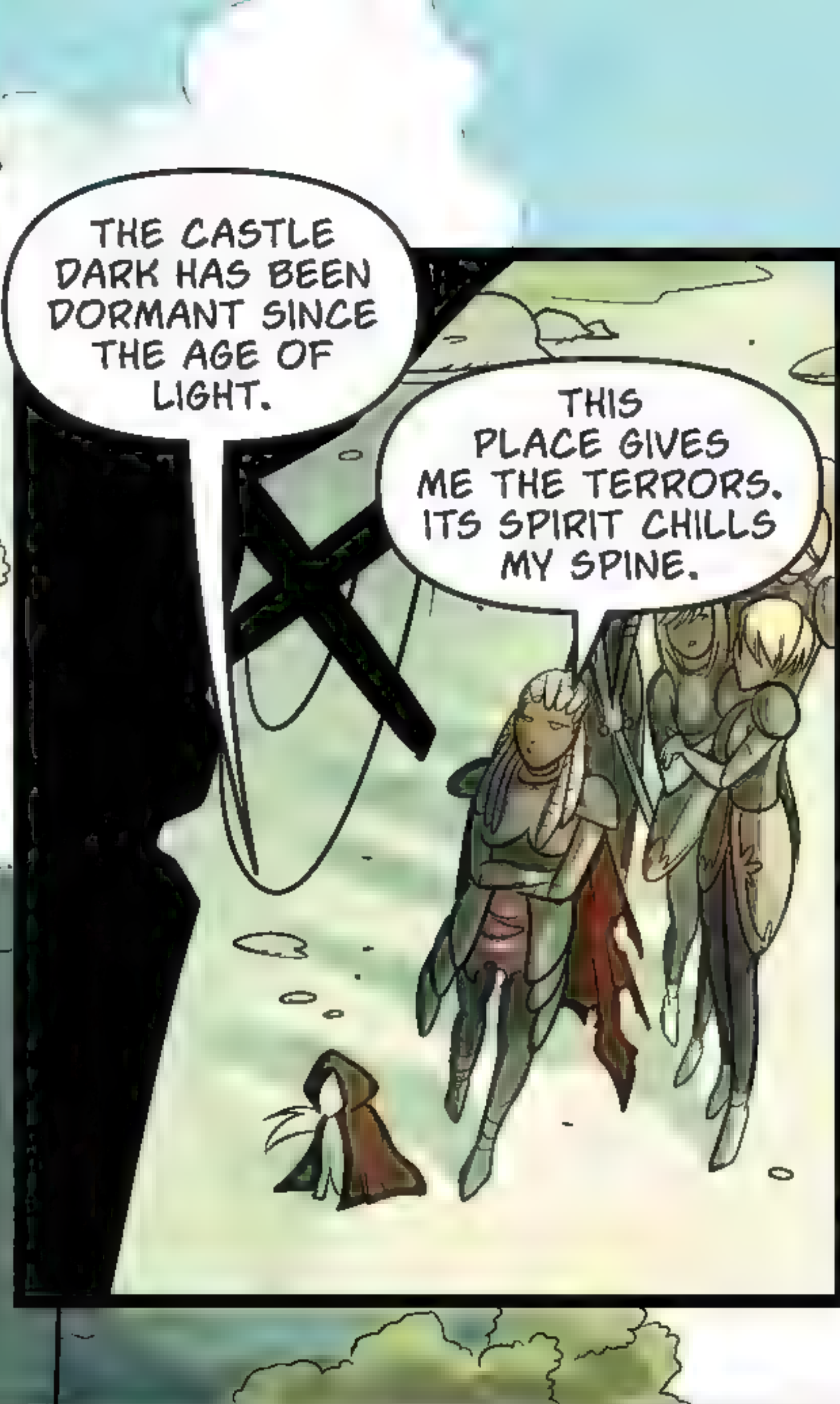
I AM...
TROUBLED.



LET US
WALK, TELL ME
EVERYTHING.



THIS CASTLE IS FALLING APART.



THE CASTLE DARK HAS BEEN DORMANT SINCE THE AGE OF LIGHT.

THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE TERRORS. ITS SPIRIT CHILLS MY SPINE.



CAREFUL OF YOUR TONE, CAPTAIN. THE WALLS HAVE EARS IN SUCH A PLACE.

WHAT USE IS IT TO WORRY? OUR COMPANY HAS BEEN SAVAGED BY BARRA'S TROOPS AND NOW MY SQUIRES WARN OF ILINA'S BATTALION REACHING EVANFAR'S BORDERS FROM THE SOUTH.

THE TERRACE TROOPS NEED NOT WORRY US-- THEY LACK DISCIPLINE.



YET, WITH OUR NUMBERS WE CANNOT OPPOSE BOTH ARMIES. EVANFAR IS LOST, JACOB.



WOULD YOU QUIT SUCH WORTHLESS BANTER! LOOK AT ME--WHAT DO YOU SEE?

A FERRET.

PRECISELY. I USED TO BE A HUMAN ONCE. HOWEVER, NOW I HAVE FUR AND A TAIL. DO YOU SEE ME QUIVERING ABOUT SUCH A BLIGHT?



AS LONG AS WE STILL DRAW BREATH, WE SHALL FIGHT!

WELL SAID, LITTLE ONE--



YOU HAVE
FOUND A FIGHT,
INDEED.



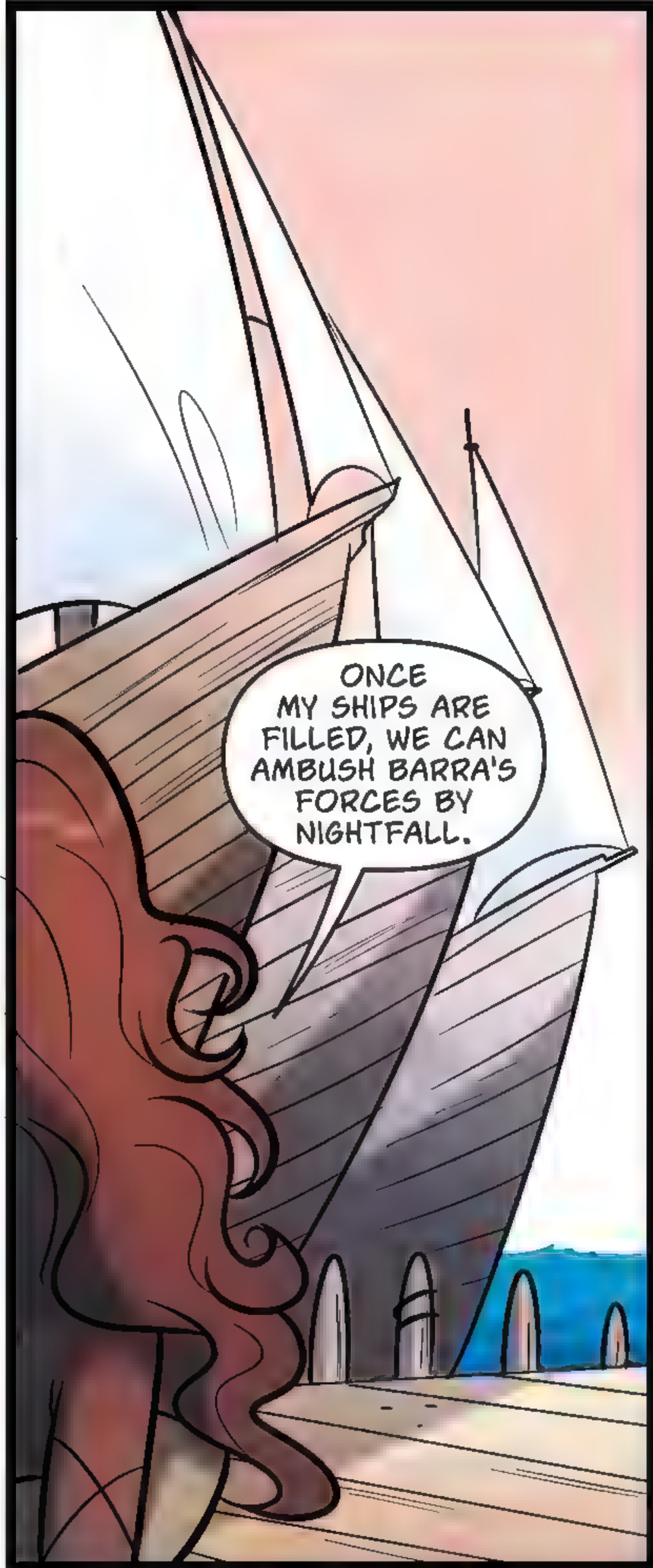
I WISH WE COULD RIDE LIRA AGAIN.

WAR IS NO PLACE FOR A SEA CREATURE. SHE MAY PROTECT ME FIERCELY, BUT HER PLACE IS IN THE WATER.



ARE YOU SURE THIS IS THE RIGHT IDEA? IF I AM FOUND---

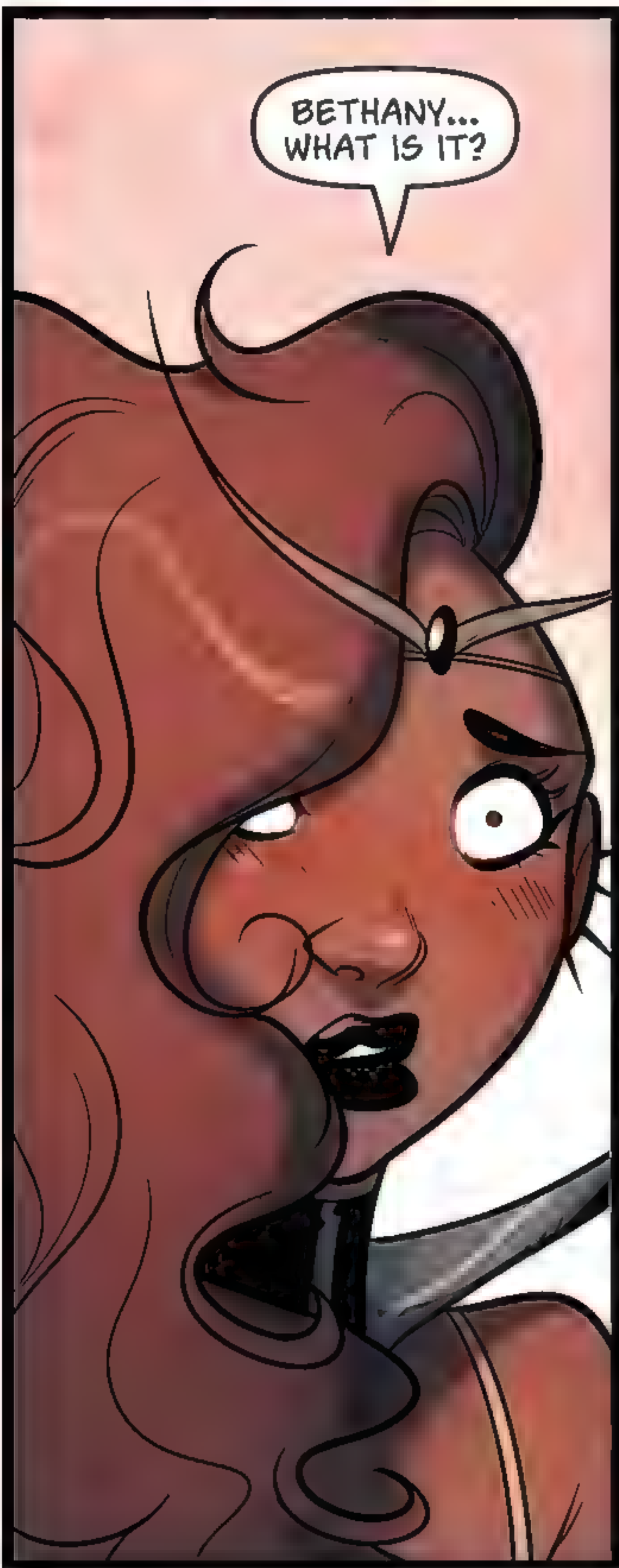
--YOUR PRESENCE MAY BE THE ONLY THING LEFT THAT CAN SAVE YOUR REALM. WE MUST TAKE THE FIGHT TO THEM.



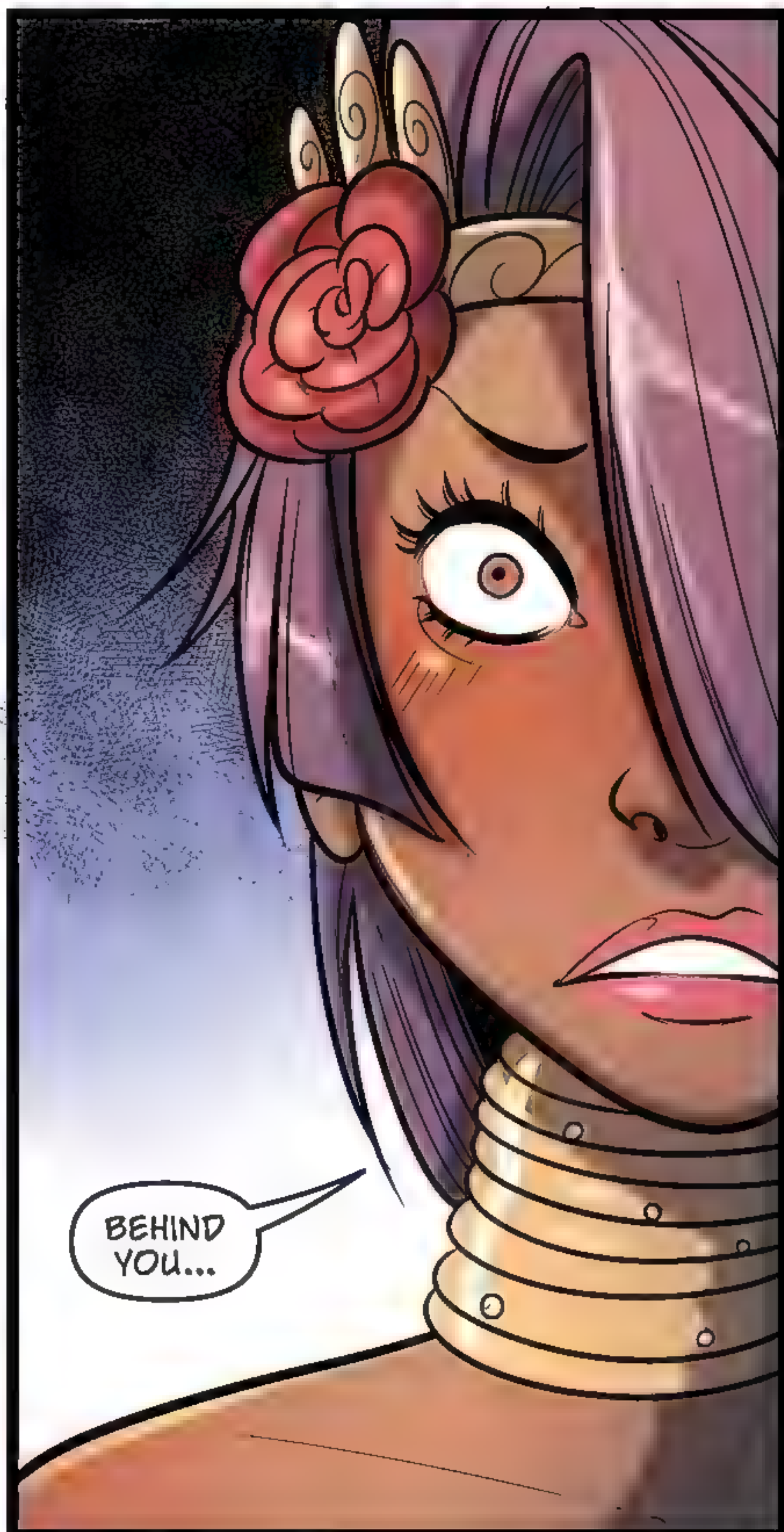
ONCE MY SHIPS ARE FILLED, WE CAN AMBUSH BARRA'S FORCES BY NIGHTFALL.



SHE WILL NEVER SEE US COMING.



BETHANY... WHAT IS IT?



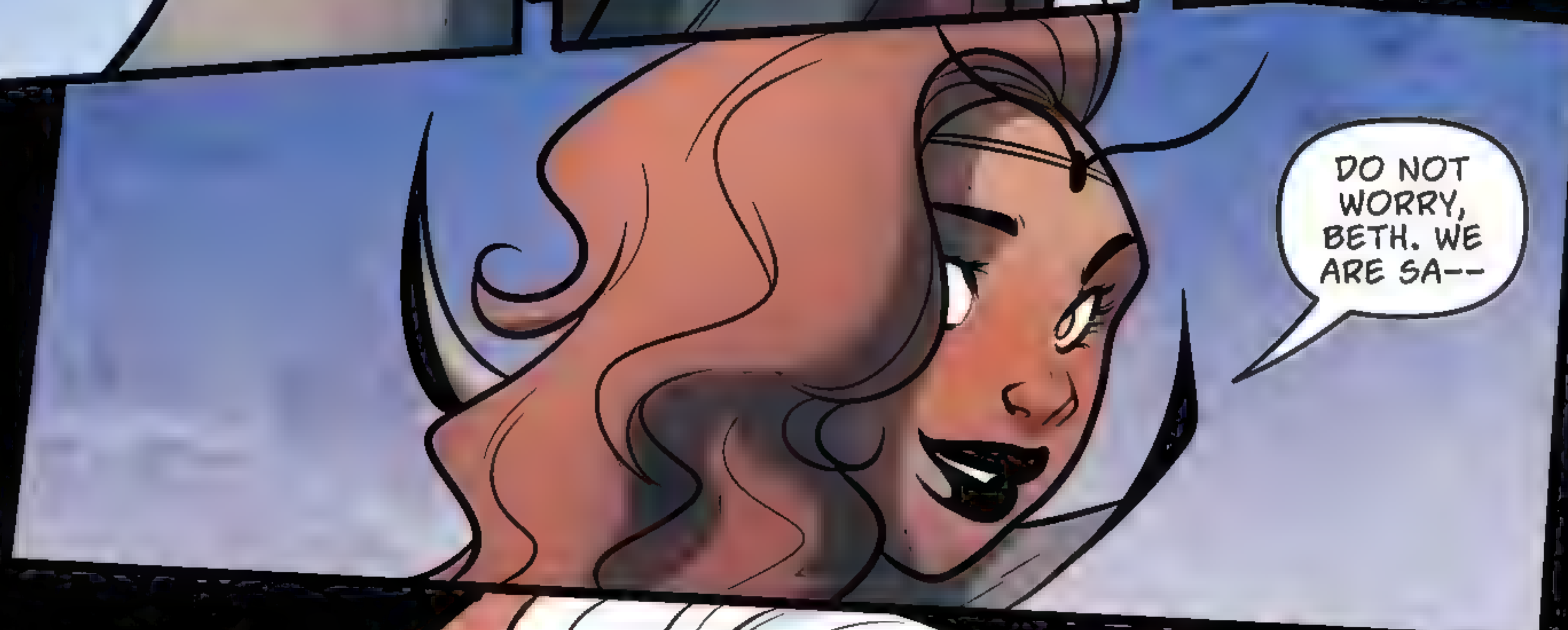
BEHIND YOU...

WHAT IS THAT..?

ARNEN OF THE KEEP. WHAT BUSINESS DO YOU HAVE SETTING FOOT ON THE MAIDENS?!

RIIIEEEEE!

BETHANY--
MOVE!



TO BE CONTINUED!

Damsels In Excess

Vol. 1 | Part 4 of 5

FEAR

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Penciled by
Mirka Andolfo

Inked by
Simone Di Meo

Colored by
**Mirka Andolfo
& MAD5 Factory**

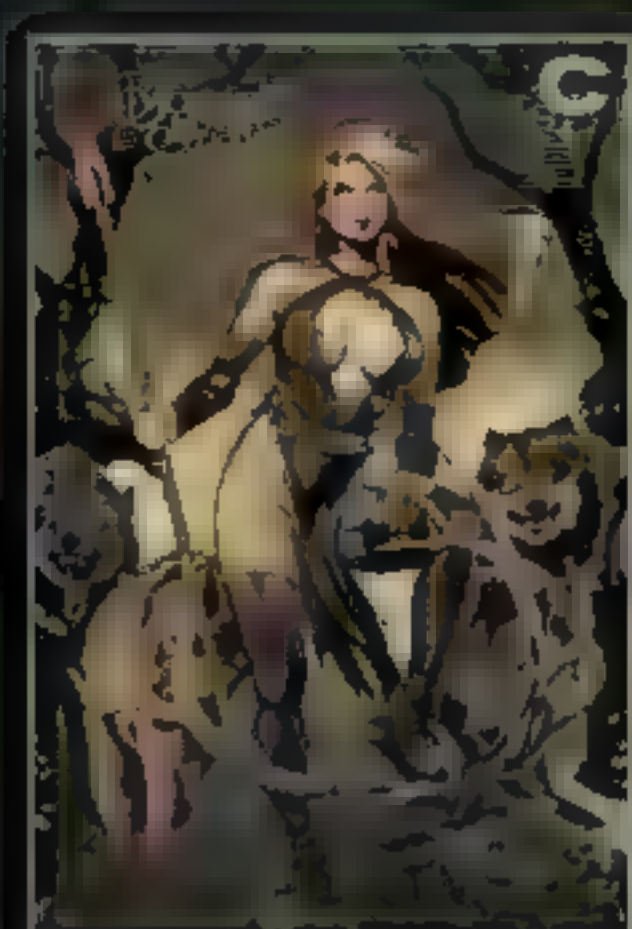
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MAP OF THE FIVE REALMS





VOL. 1

#5

OF 5

COVER A

Damsels in Excess

Tommy Thompson • David Smith
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Damselfox

Written by Mirka Andolfo
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REUNION

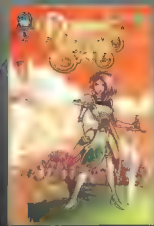
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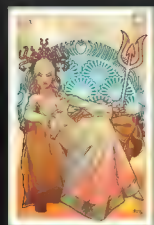
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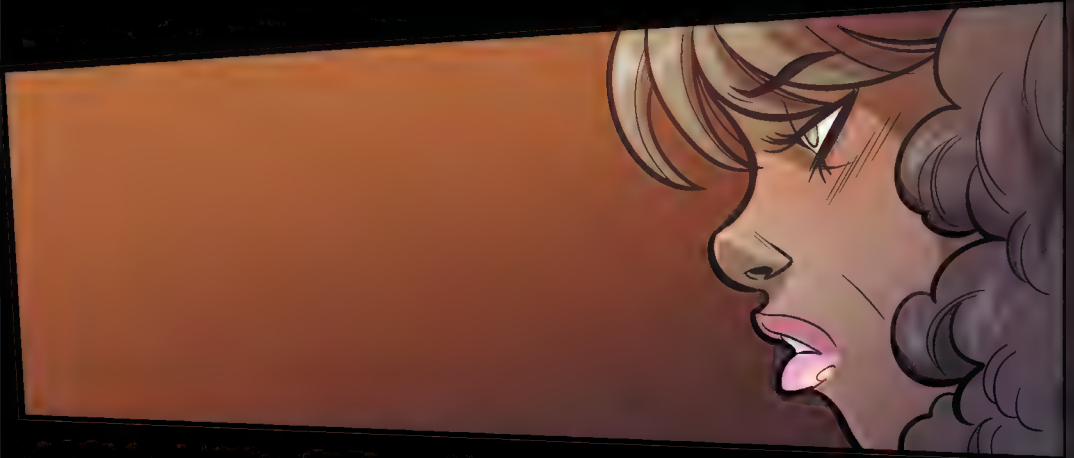
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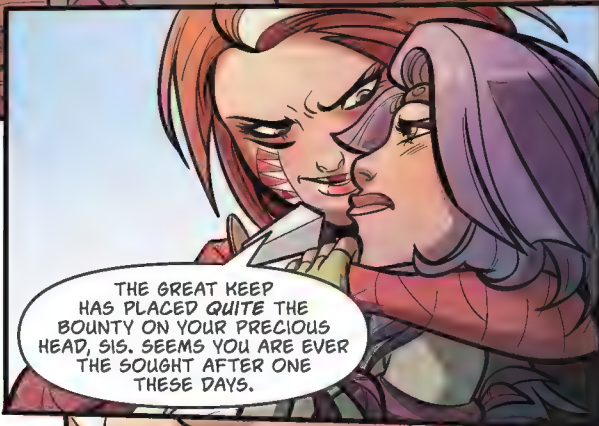
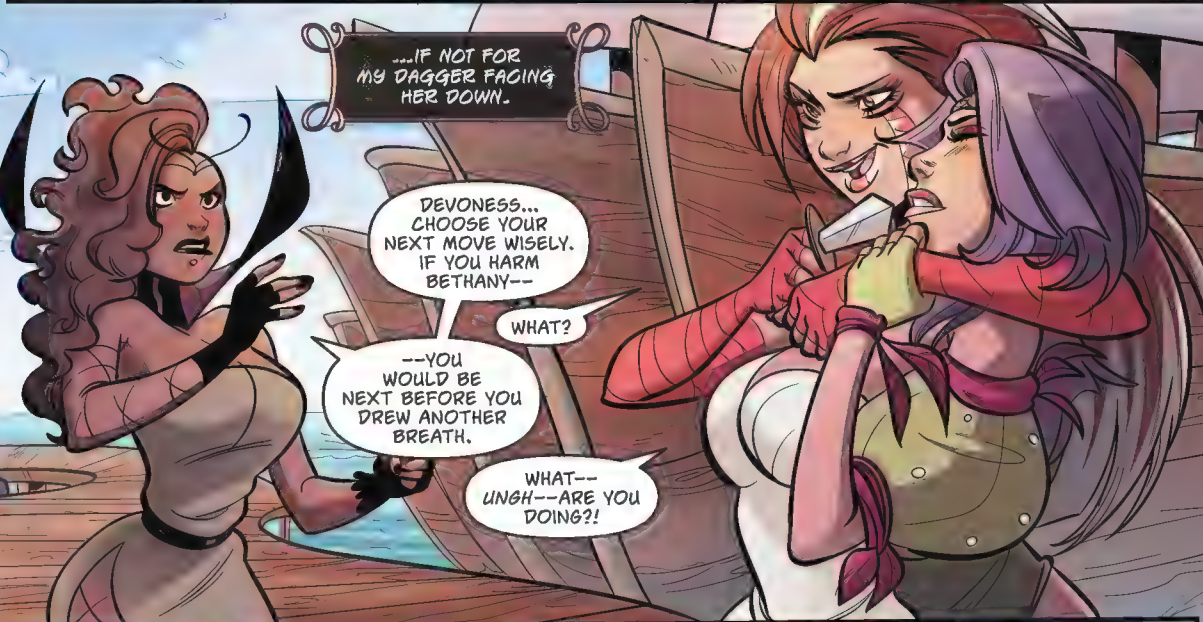
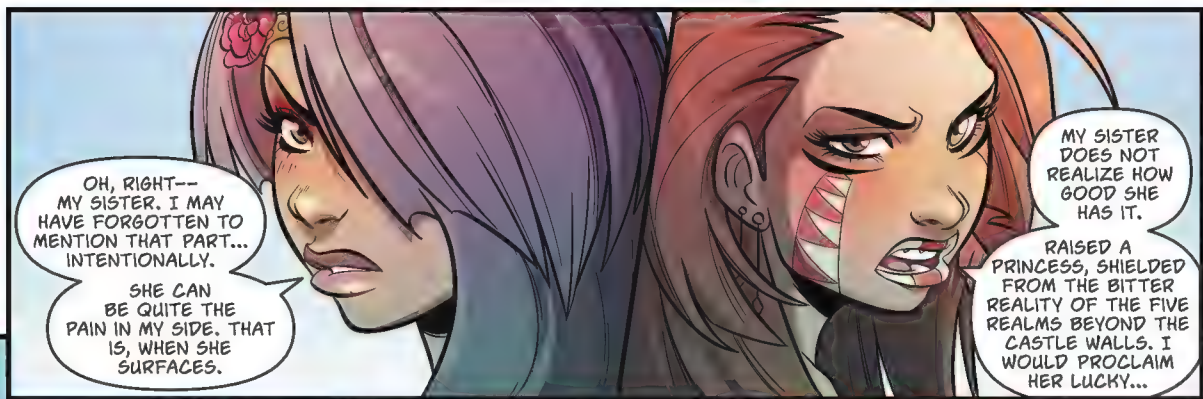
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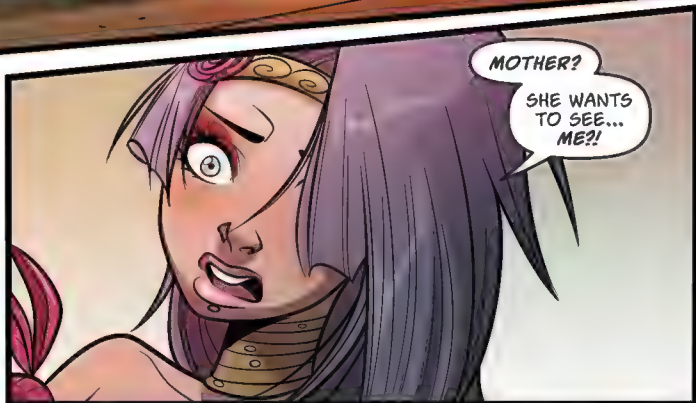
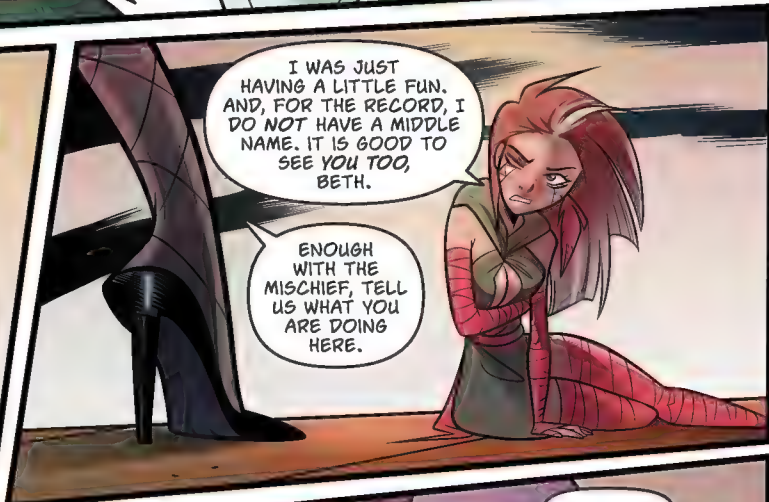
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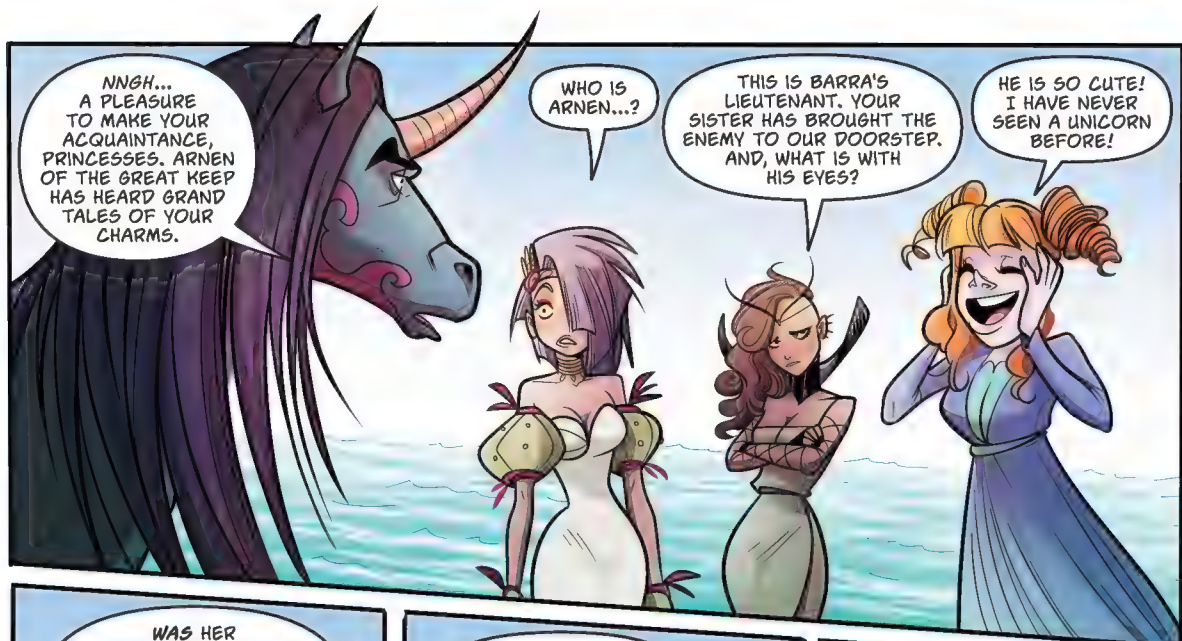
FOR THE FANS WITH FEELINGS: 1-888-COMIC-BOOK INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST REPRESENTATIVE: **CHRISTINE MEYER** | christine@aspenmlt.com



**“To defeat your foe, you must
understand what they fear most.”**







NNGH...
A PLEASURE
TO MAKE YOUR
ACQUAINTANCE,
PRINCESSES. ARNEN
OF THE GREAT KEEP
HAS HEARD GRAND
TALES OF YOUR
CHARMS.

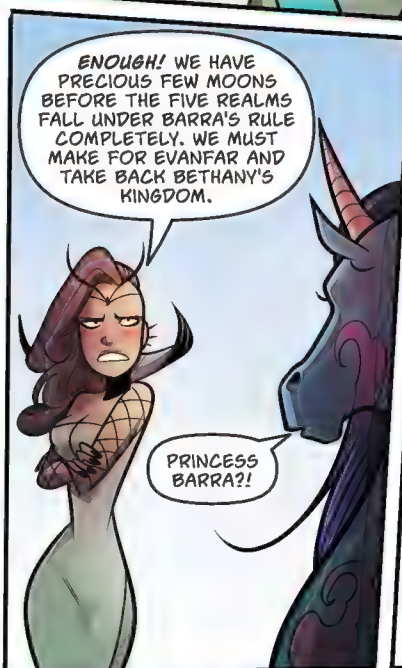
WHO IS
ARNEN...?

THIS IS BARRA'S
LIEUTENANT. YOUR
SISTER HAS BROUGHT THE
ENEMY TO OUR DOORSTEP.
AND, WHAT IS WITH
HIS EYES?

HE IS SO CUTE!
I HAVE NEVER
SEEN A UNICORN
BEFORE!



WAS HER
LIEUTENANT. HE
IS NOW UNDER OUR
CONTROL. MOTHER ALWAYS
LIKES TO KEEP TABS ON HER
POSSESSIONS, YOU KNOW.
THEFT HAS BECOME QUITE
THE ISSUE IN THE
REALMS.



ENOUGH! WE HAVE
PRECIOUS FEW MOONS
BEFORE THE FIVE REALMS
FALL UNDER BARRA'S RULE
COMPLETELY. WE MUST
MAKE FOR EVANFAR AND
TAKE BACK BETHANY'S
KINGDOM.

PRINCESS
BARRA?!



YES, HORSE.
YOUR MADDENING EX-
PRINCESS HAS PUT THE
PEACE AND SANCTITY OF ALL
THE REALMS IN JEOPARDY WITH
HER GREED. YOU ARE LUCKY I
DO NOT FEED YOU TO MY
SAILORS ON PRINCIPLE.

ARNEN
IS NOT A
HORSE!



PLEASE--
CAN WE JUST
FIGURE OUT
WHAT TO DO
NEXT?

THE CHOICE IS
SIMPLE. IF WE DO NOT
TAKE BACK YOUR CASTLE BY
FORCE, WE MAY NEVER GET
ANOTHER CHANCE.



THE PROBLEM
WITH YOU TWO
IS YOU LACK THE
ABILITY TO THINK
LIKE YOUR
ENEMY...

TO DEFEAT
YOUR FOE, YOU
MUST UNDERSTAND
WHAT THEY FEAR
MOST.

I THINK I
KNOW HOW WE CAN
ALL GET WHAT WE
WANT.

EVANFAR
THIRTY MOONS
LATER

I MUST HAND IT TO THE FORMER PRINCESS, HER THRONE IS INDEED MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE THAN MY OWN. WE MUST FIND HER INTERIOR MASTER OF DESIGN AND IMPRISON HER FOR MY CHAMBER ROOM DUTY.

YOUR HIGHNESS, EVANFAR'S REMAINING RESISTANCE HAS TAKEN RESIDENCE AT CASTLE DARK. SHALL WE SEND A LEGION TO ROUT THEM?

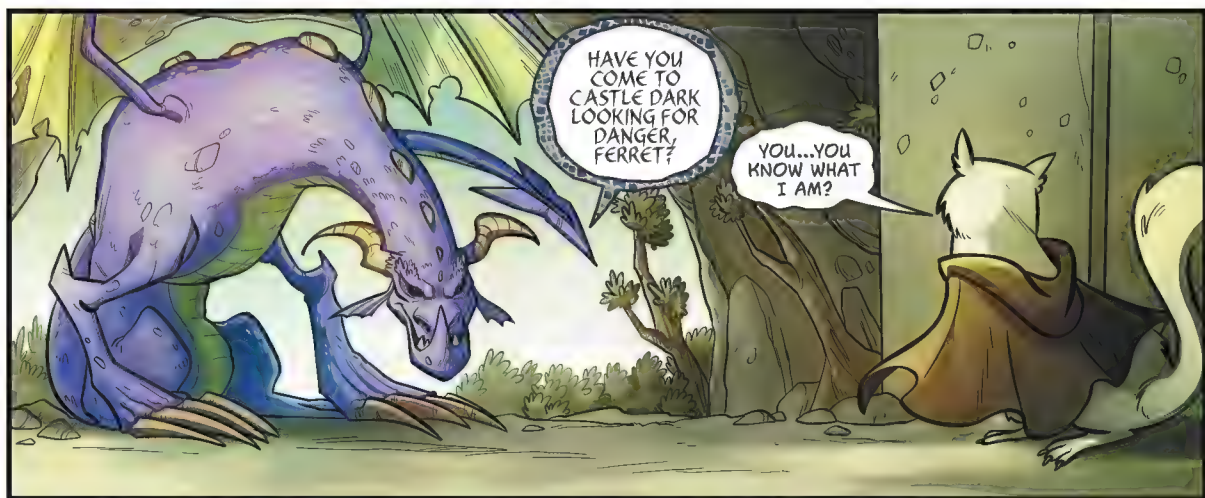
WHY BOTHER-- LET THEM ROT. THERE ARE FAR MORE DANGEROUS DWELLERS WITHIN THOSE WALLS THAN OUR SOLDIERS. LET THEM DISCOVER FOR THEMSELVES.

AS YOU WISH.

NO, IF BETHANY SEEKS TO RECLAIM HER THRONE, THEY WILL SURELY COME FROM THE NORTH. KIMBERLEIN THINKS HER ARMY WILL BE ENOUGH TO OVERWHELM MY FORCES, BUT SHE IS SORELY MISTAKEN.

FORTIFY ALL CROSSROADS LEADING FROM THE NORTH. I WANT YOU TO BE WAITING FOR THEM WHEN THEY REACH DRY LAND.

AND FIND ARNEN AT ONCE! HIS ABSENCE HAS CAUSED ME WORRY TO NO END!



CLOUD'S PURGE.

WITH EVANFAR SACKED, MY KINGDOM WILL BE STRICKEN WITH SUSPICION OF THE NEW OCCUPANTS. THE GREAT KEEP IS NO FRIEND TO THE FORGE.

AND THIS IS WHY YOU HAVE SOUGHT MY COUNCIL-- FOR WAR STRATEGY?

TO BE HONEST-- I HAVE NO IDEA WHY I HAVE JOURNEYED FOR HER COUNCIL, YET I FIND MYSELF MORE AT ODDS THAN EVER BEFORE.

I HAVE COME TO YOU FOR CLARITY. YOU HAVE NEVER STEERED ME WRONG BEFORE.

AND WHAT DOES YOUR HEART TELL YOU?

THAT BETHANY DOES NOT DESERVE TO DIE. WHAT GOOD IS DEVOTION TO MORALITY WHEN IT IS FOUNDED UPON BREAKING THE BONDS OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP?

THEN WHAT IS YOUR QUANDARY? ARE YOU NOT IN POSITION TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE? OR DO YOU FEAR THE CONSEQUENCES OF SAID ACTION? IT IS NOT LIKE YOU TO FEAR SUCH REPRISALS, AM I WRONG?

I FORGOT THAT YOU ARE ALL QUESTIONS. AND, SOMEHOW, I THINK... I HAVE FOUND RESOLUTION THROUGH YOUR INTERROGATION.

ARE WE NOT ALL BOUND TO DISCOVERY THROUGH DESPAIR?

EVER CONSISTENT WITH YOUR APPROACH, MY DEAR FRIEND.

EIGHT MOONS LATER
REALM'S CROSS.

HOW DO
I KNOW I CAN
TRUST YOU?

ARNEN
COULD SAY
THE SAME OF
YOU.

YOU COULD.
YET, YOU ARE MY
PRISONER. DO NOT
CONFUSE OUR
ROLES.

IS THAT
WHAT YOU
CONSIDER ARNEN?
A CAPTIVE? ARNEN
IS AIDING YOUR
CAUSE.

YOU ARE
STILL A LIEUTENANT
OF THE GREAT KEEP,
OUR SWORN ENEMY
AT THE MOMENT.

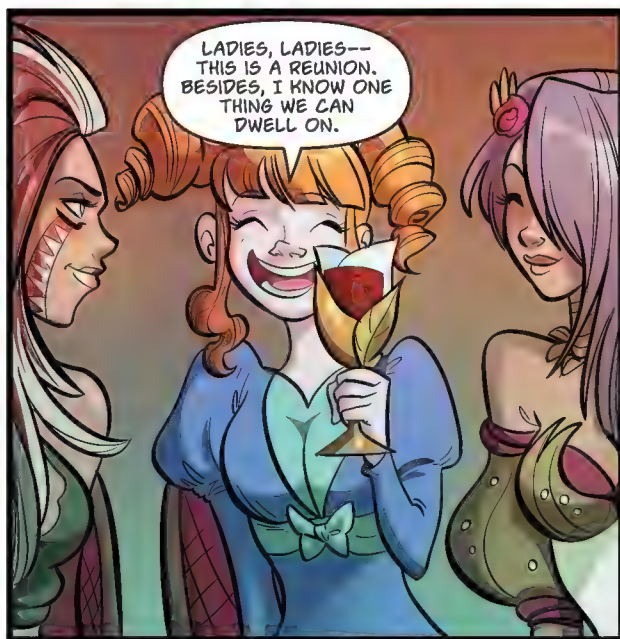
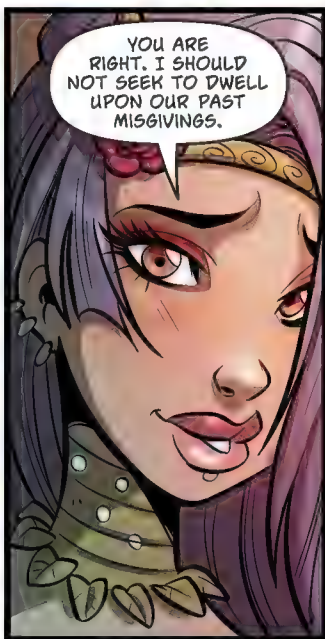
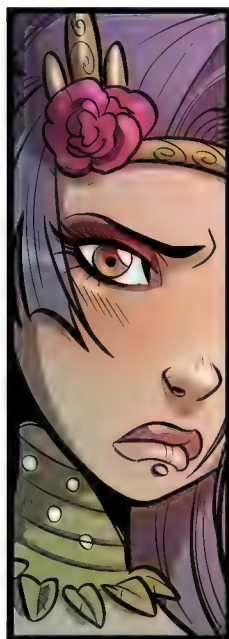
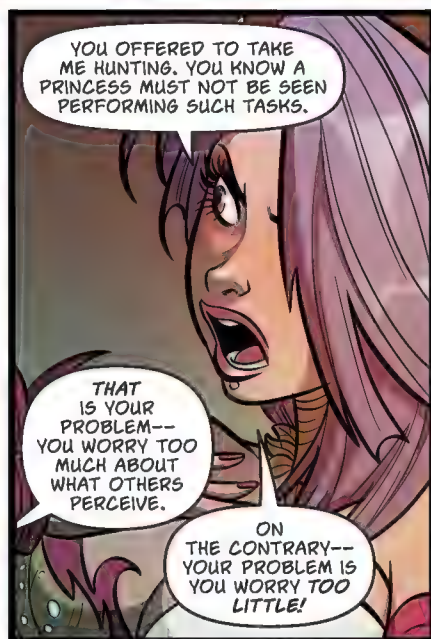
ARNEN KNOWS
NOTHING OF THE STRIFE
BETWEEN REALMS. ARNEN HAS
SPENT THE LAST SEASON
IN THE PROTECTION OF
QUEEN VALERIA.

IS THAT WHAT
YOU CALL HER
HOLD OVER YOU--
PROTECTION?

ARNEN IS NOT
AS FOOLISH AS ALL WOULD
BELIEVE. ARNEN SERVED THE
PRINCESS BARRA SINCE BIRTH,
AND...SHE IS NOT THE ANSWER TO
THE PROBLEMS OF THE REALMS.
SHE IS EVER A FRIEND, YET...
CONSUMED BY GREED AND
POWER SHE IS, INDEED.

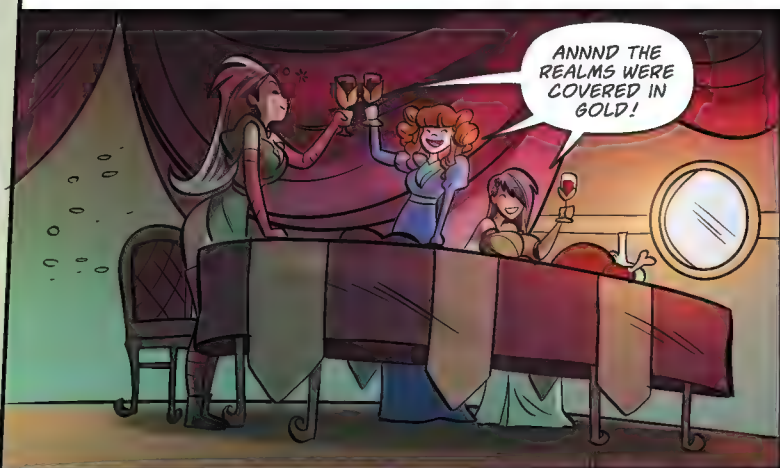
IT IS TIME
FOR REAL CHANGE
IN THE FIVE. THE QUEEN
OF SHADOWS MAY BE IN
CONTROL OF ARNEN'S
ACTIONS...

...YET, DO
NOT ASSUME
ARNEN DOES NOT
KNOW PRECISELY
WHAT ARNEN IS
DOING.



OUR JOURNEY
TO SAVE THE FIVE
GROWS EVER MORE
UNCERTAIN AS WE SAIL
TO THE SHADOW
MOUNTAINS.

I HAVE PLACED MY
LIVELIHOOD AND THE
FUTURE OF THE REALMS
IN MY DEVOTION TO
BETHANY...



ANNND THE
REALMS WERE
COVERED IN
GOLD!



KIM!
I MEAN ~~BURP!~~
PRINCESS KIMBERLEIN!
COME--JOIN US. YOU HAVE
STOCKED YOUR SHIP WITH
SOME CHOICE SPIRITS,
IF I MAY SAY
SO.

AND
YOU DO.

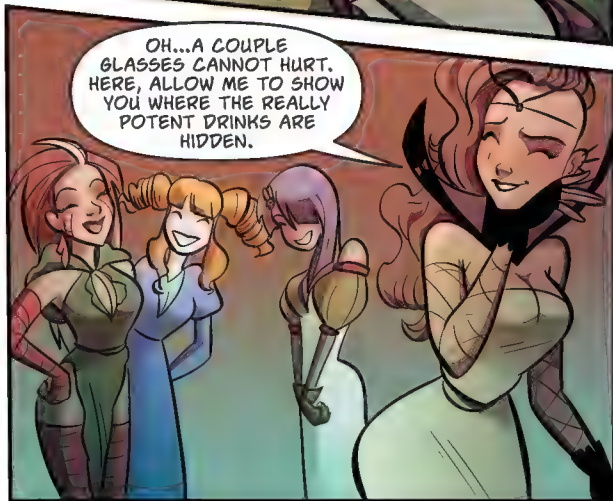
I DO!



JUST
A FEW SIPS,
KIM. I WON'T
TELL.



COME,
LET US
REJOICE IN
THE COMPANY
WE FIGHT SO
DEARLY FOR, AT
LEAST ONCE
BEFORE WAR
IS UPON
US.



OH...A COUPLE
GLASSES CANNOT HURT.
HERE, ALLOW ME TO SHOW
YOU WHERE THE REALLY
POTENT DRINKS ARE
HIDDEN.



BELIEVE IT OR NOT, STRATEGY WAS NOT ALWAYS MY STRONG SUIT...

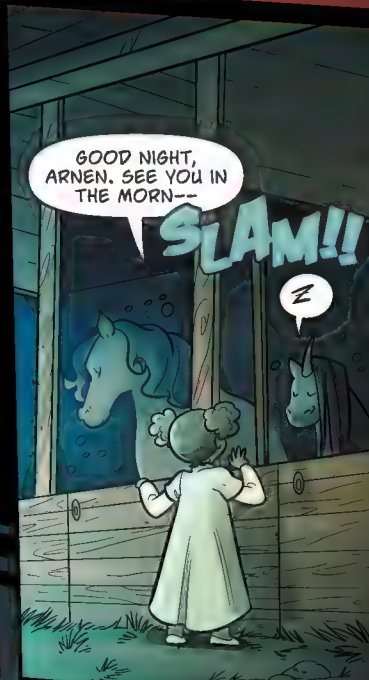
I WAS ONCE VERY LOST.



YEEEEEEIII!!
KEEP GOING
ARNEN!



YOU ARE
THE BEST
UNICORN
EVER!



GOOD NIGHT,
ARNEN. SEE YOU IN
THE MORN---

SLAM!!

Z



YOU HAVE COST
THE SLEEP OF TEN
OF MY RIDERS AS THEY
SEARCHED FOR YOU ALL
NIGHT, DAUGHTER. WHAT
HAVE I TOLD YOU OF
LEAVING THE CASTLE
PAST SUNSET?

I...I AM
SORRY,
FATHER. I
HAVE---

--SILENCE.



ONE DAY YOU
WILL BE WED TO A FUTURE
KING, AND YOU WILL LOOK TO
YOUR CITIZENS TO FOLLOW YOUR
ORDERS. IF WE DO NOT HEED OUR
OWN ACTIONS, HOW ARE WE TO
COMMAND OTHERS TO DO
THE SAME? DO YOU NOT
UNDERSTAND THIS..?

I...I DO,
FATHER. I AM
SORRY I DISOBEYED
YOUR ORDER.

I AM
AS WELL,
BARRA...



SLAP!



GULP



...I AM SORRY I MUST DO THIS.

KRSSH!

PLEASE!
NOT AGAIN,
FATHER!

DO NOT
BEG, BARRA.
IT IS UNBECOMING
OF A PRINCESS. YOU
MUST LEARN YOUR
LESSON.

I LEARNED
MY LESSON VERY
SOON THEREAFTER. MY
STRATEGY WAS CLEAR FROM
THAT POINT ON. MEN HAVE
NO PLACE IN THE FIVE.
THEY ARE A CHAPTER IN
OUR HISTORY, NEVER
TO RETURN.



TEN MOONS LATER

I HAVE NO CLUE WHAT I AM TO SAY TO HER WHEN I SEE HER. I HAVE HEARD SO MANY TALES OF HER EVIL.

MOTHER IS NOT EVIL. THAT IS ALL A MYTH FABRICATED BY HER OWN DOING. HOW ELSE DO YOU STAY ALIVE AFTER YOU HAVE EXTERMINATED ALL THE MEN IN THE FIVE?

YET, THAT WAS HER DOING AS WELL.

IT IS NOT HER FAULT, BETHANY. YOURS EITHER, YOU KNOW. SOON YOUR POWERS WILL MANIFEST, AND THEY WILL SEEK TO DESTROY YOU, TOO.

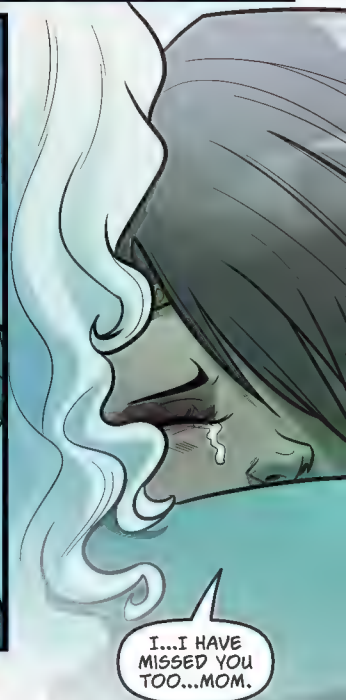
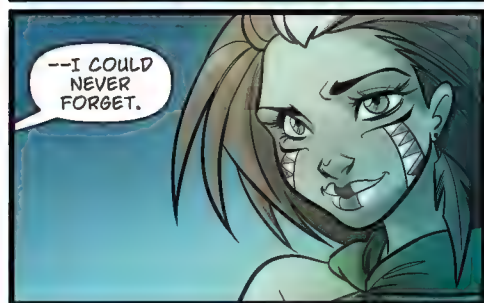
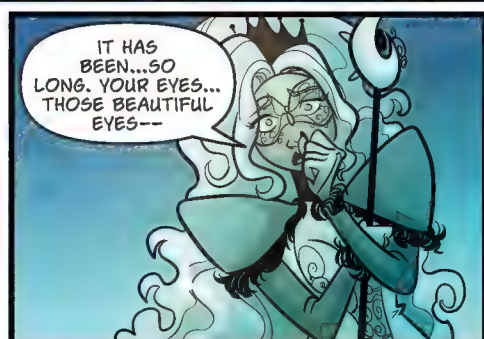
TOO LATE--THEY ALREADY DO.

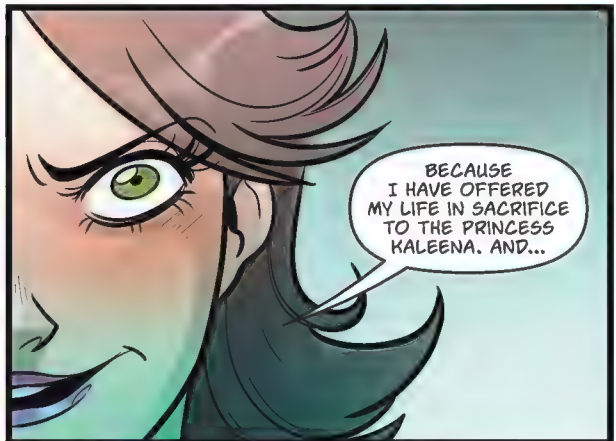
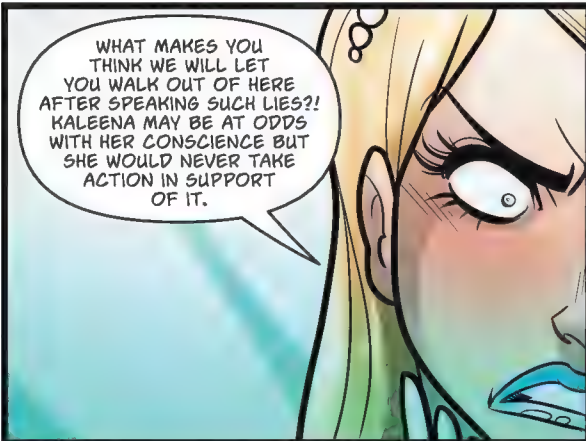
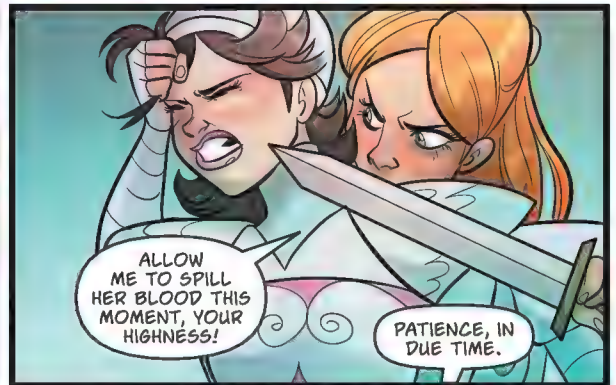
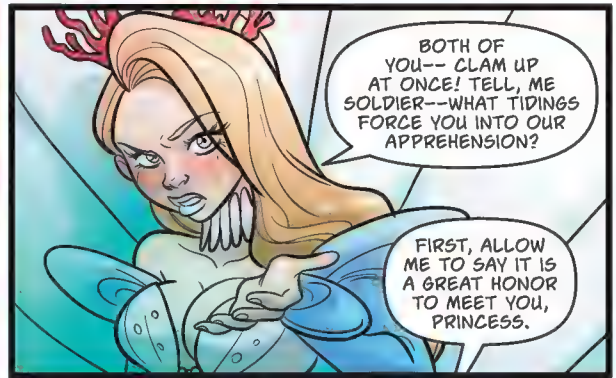
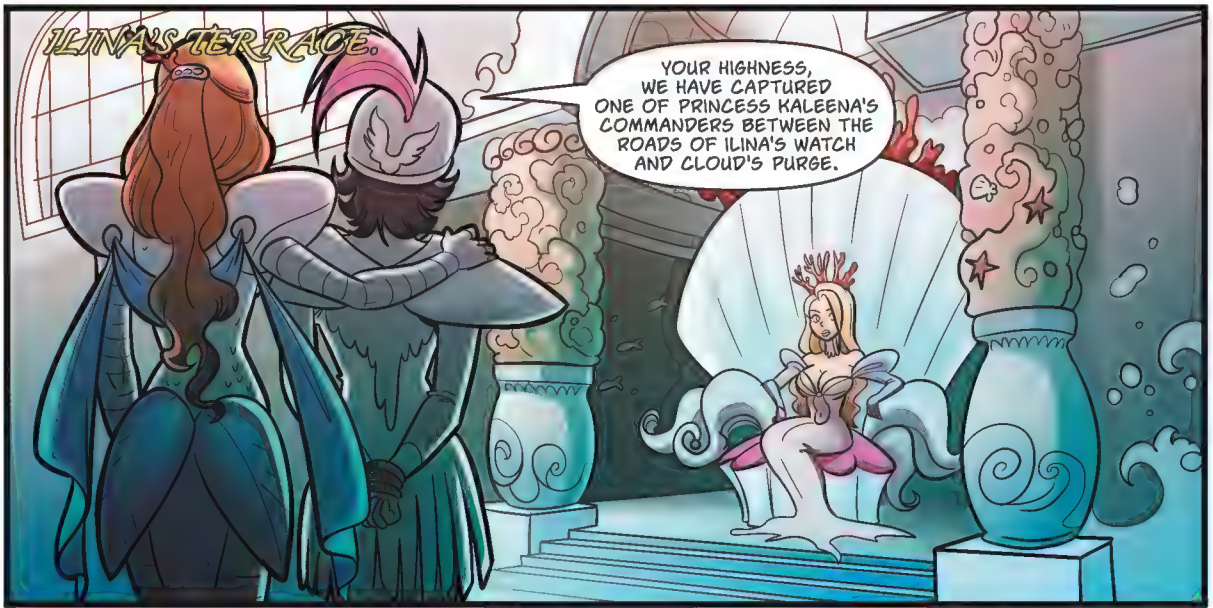
SEE, YOU TWO ARE NOT AS DIFFERENT AS YOU MAY THINK.

SHHH. ARNEN KNOWS WE ARE CLOSE.

YES, YOU ARE, UNICORN...

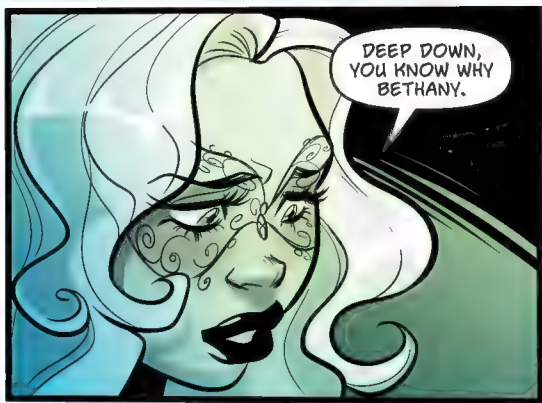
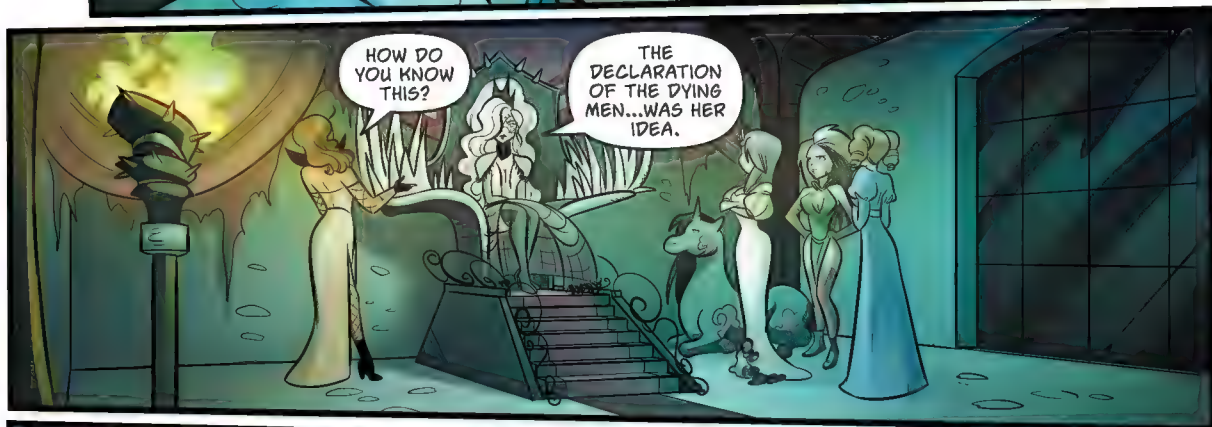
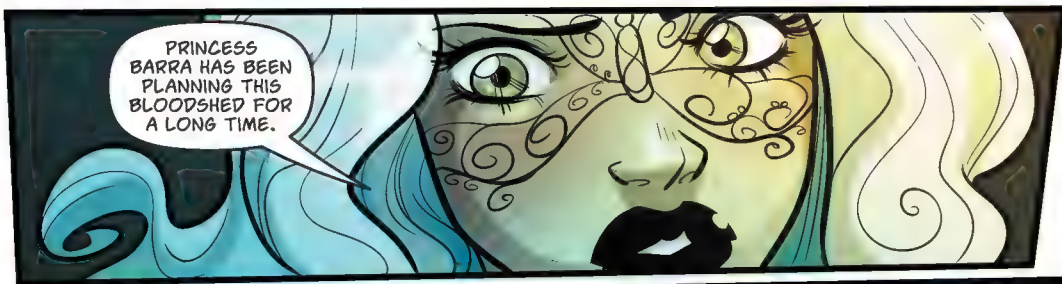
...WELCOME BACK.





...BECAUSE ILINA'S
WATCH HAS BEEN SACKED.
YOU WILL NEED TO EXCHANGE
ME IF YOU EVER WISH TO SEE
THE WATCH'S LIEUTENANTS
ALIVE AGAIN.





WELL, IT IS DUE TIME HER LIES CAUGHT UP TO HER. TIME SHE PAID WITH HER OWN BLOOD.

I AGREE ON THE BLOOD PART.

IF ARNEN MAY SPEAK--BARRA IS CONSUMED BY GREED BUT NOT FRIVOLOUS IN HER DEFENSE. SHE WILL BE EXPECTING AN ATTACK. EVEN WITH KIMBERLEIN'S FORCES ON THE BEACH, WE ARE TOO FEW TO RECLAIM EVANFAR.

YOU FORGET ONE THING, STEED. WE HAVE SOMEONE IN OUR MIDST THAT CAN EASILY SLIP PAST HER DEFENSES. SOMEONE SHE KNOWS AND TRUSTS.

GOOD BEAST.

...ARNEN.

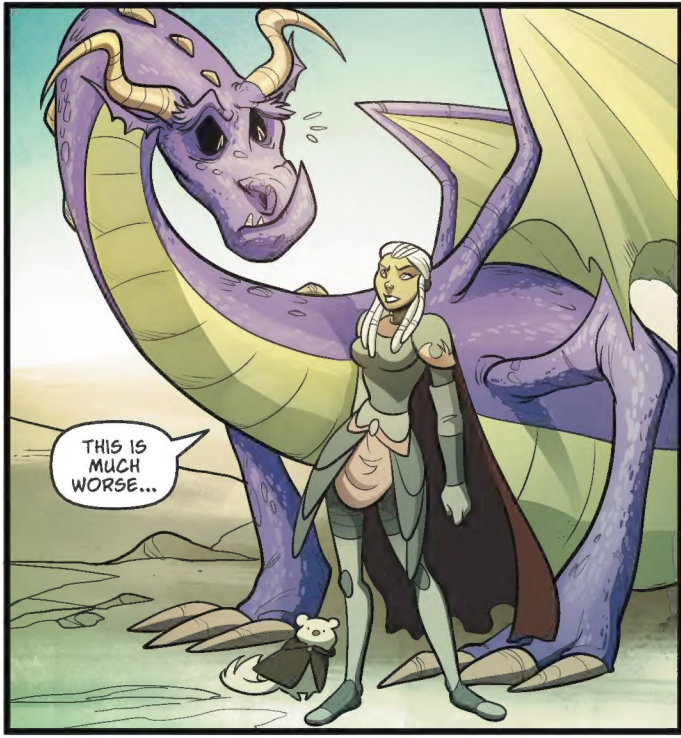
THAT IS NOT ALL...

THERE IS A REASON I HAVE WAITED SO LONG TO SEND FOR YOU, BETHANY. IT WAS NOT SELFISHNESS. IT WAS SOMETHING... MORE.

YOU HAVE BLOOMED, MY DEAR. YOU ARE LIKE ME NOW. A DEATHBRINGER-- AND WE ARE NOT ALONE. ON THE CONTRARY...



...WE HAVE
AN ARMY OF
OUR OWN.





IT IS
MEN.

THE END.
DAMSELS IN EXCESS
VOLUME ONE
TO BE CONTINUED...?!